LOW CASTE PROTEST AND THE CREATION OF A POLITICAL IDENTITY: MAHATMA JOTIRAO PHULE AND THE ORIGINS OF NON-BRAHMAN IDEOLOGY IN MAHARASHTRA, 1855-1890.

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Synopsis:

This study examines the ideas of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, the first leader and most influential theoretician of the movement of political and religious protest that emerged amongst the peasant cultivators and urban lower castes of Maharashtra in the late nineteenth century.

It looks first at the origins of his ideas and the intellectual and social milieu in which he worked. Phule's demand for a greater share of local political power and social leadership for the lower castes had antecedents in the ideological disputes between Brahmans and Maratha families in Southern Maharashtra immediately after the establishment of British rule. His opposition to contemporary religious institutions is situated within a general crisis in the public legitimacy of Hindu culture and religion in the mid-nineteenth century. Phule's detailed critique of Hindu religion also owed much to the traditions of rational criticism of religion that emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century and which were reflected in the work of Orientalist scholars. His ideas about the individual in society, and about the nature of God, are argued to owe more to European and American traditions of natural rights thought, and to the arguments of protestant Christian missionaries, than to indigenous devotional and monotheistic traditions.

The study then describes how Phule traced the subjection of the lower castes to the Aryan invasions of ancient India, when the

prosperous kingdoms of peasant cultivators and warriors had been subjected to Brahman rule and religion. He supported this idea of a mythic past through the reinterpretation of a wide variety of symbols, institutions and social processes that were already an integral part of popular culture. He hoped thus to take up traditional popular identities and loyalties centred on an identification with the land and the old warrior traditions of Maharashtra, and to use these in an overtly political way, as the ideological basis for a political movement of the lower castes.

A detailed understanding of Phule's ideas provides materials for the development of our understanding of the ideological dimension of political and social conflict in nineteenth century Maharashtra, a dimension which has been neglected in favour of the analysis of political institutions and party rivalries.

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Note on Translations

Almost all the material used in this study is in Marathi. All translations are my own, and I have tried to render these as accurately as possible. All quotations from Phule's work are taken from the recently published collection, The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule, edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, Pune 1969, unless otherwise stated. Where matters of translation are in doubt, I have used Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary, published in 1857. For the convenience of the reader, I have translated the titles of all Marathi books into English, but have indicated in brackets that the work is in Marathi when it is first referred to in each chapter. The system of transliteration that I have used for Marathi words is that of the American Library of Congress Catalogue, although I have omitted all diacritical marks, on the grounds that these are not strictly necessary in a work of this kind, and make reading less easy for the reader without a familiarity with the Devanagari script. Where a word is already very familiar in its Anglicised form, I have kept to that, rather than rendering it according to the method of transliteration described above.

Chapter One

Low caste protest in nineteenth century western India

In recent years, scholarly research into the history of the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century has focussed upon a very wide variety of problems. One very important area for interest has been the growth of the political and administrative institutions of the British Raj, and the responses of Indians to these in the construction of local and provincial, and finally national, political organisations. A search for quite different kinds of unities to make sense of the diversity of South Asian society forms another area of interest: unities provided by caste, religious and cultural activities. This study of the ideological dimension of the movement of political and religious protest that emerged amongst the peasant cultivators and urban lower castes of western Maharashtra from the middle of the nineteenth century is an attempt to examine an area where these two concerns intersect.

The second of these interests has resulted in the illumination of a whole variety of areas of Indian society about which relatively little is known. Studies that spring to mind range from Kenneth Jones' work on the Arya Samaj[1] and J.T.F. Jordens' study of Dayananda

1. Kenneth W. Jones, Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.

Sarasvati,[2] to David Kopf's work on the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal.[3]

At the same time, an enormous amount of scholarly energy has been devoted to the study of Indian political development. Prominent here is the work done in the last decade from Cambridge University. Among these may be mentioned Gordon Johnson's study of nationalist politics in the Bombay presidency, Christopher Bayly's work on Allahabad, the studies of South India at different periods by David Washbrook and Christopher Baker, Anil Seal's work on the nationalist movement at the all-India level, and the book of essays edited by Anil Seal, John Gallagher and Gordon Johnson.[4] These studies have sought to trace the origins and development of the varieties of nationalist movements in India, and in particular the history of the Congress Party. They have addressed themselves with remarkable

2. J.T.F. Jordens, Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas Oxford University Press, 1978.

3. David Kopf, The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind, Princeton University Press, 1979.

4. Gordon Johnson, Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880-1815, Cambridge University Press, 1973; Christopher Bayly, The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880-1920, Oxford University Press, 1975; David Washbrook, The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920, Cambridge University Press, 1976; Christopher Baker, The Politics of South India 1920-1937, Cambridge University Press 1976; Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the later nineteenth century, Cambridge University Press, 1968; John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (Eds.), Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics 1870 to 1940, Cambridge University Press, 1973.

consistency to the same nexus of issues: to the development of the organised nationalist movement and its relations with the spread of imperial administration, to local political responses to the extensions of representative government and the formation of the local political organisations of the Congress party, to the nature of local political alliances and the linkages that developed between political groupings at the local and provincial levels, to the emergence from these of a national movement, and to the role of political ideologies in men's pursuit of their real political interests. Between them, these studies have attempted to present a more general picture of the nature of Indian politics in this period, of the real workings of the political systems called into existence by the Raj, and, behind the rhetoric of conflicting ideologies, of the true nature of men's political goals in a quest for political power and status set off by the extension of representative government towards the end of the nineteenth century.

This study has two main intentions. The first is to bring together the two areas of interest mentioned above, to show how the political conflicts often associated with the British Raj, and the religious and cultural movements that seem to pertain more to changes within Indian society, can be studied more usefully in conjunction with one another than pursued as separate problems. The second is to point out and question some of the assumptions about the nature of political development in nineteenth century India that lie behind the work mentioned above.

Three features of the latter stand out. Firstly, all of them

are concerned with the development of organised nationalist politics in India, and with the emergence of the Congress party as an active political force. Common to each is the idea that the crucial processes of Indian politics, which might be used as a frame through which to view and make sense of the activities of different social groups, consisted in the extension of the British administration and of its representative institutions, and the organisation of Indians in response to this. In his interpretative introduction to the book of essays, Anil Seal suggests that

> 'Indians needed to treat with the Raj, and increasingly they came to do so by exploiting its structure of control and the form in which its commands were cast. This called for a political structure of their own which could match the administrative and representative structure of the Raj, and was in time to inherit its functions. In this way, we may help to explain the nature of the linkages which were to bind together the very different activities of Indians in arenas large and small'.5

Gordon Johnson proposes a very similar conceptual framework for his study of the growth of the Congress movement in the Bombay Presidency. Its general argument runs that from the later nineteenth century in India a new kind of political activity emerged which can properly be called 'national' in scope. This development was drawn on by alterations in the ways in which India was governed, and the Indian National Congress was formed to present Indian demands at the centres of policy-making. Although the early Congress and the various provincial public associations from which it arose, were dominated by a relatively small number of men, they had nevertheless drawn up the rules of Indian nationalism, and had a proper under-

5. Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and Nationalism in India' in J. Gallagher, G. Johnson and A. Seal, (Eds.), op. cit., p. 6.

standing of the bounds of all-India politics. Their exploitation of the changing constitution of the government of India had created new grounds for unity in Indian society. It involved other groups, who were keen to avail themselves of the opportunity to air local grievances on an all-India platform. While the demands of the moderate nationalist politicians reflected their own group interests, the remarkable thing about them was that they could genuinely be pursued at an all-India level.[6]

The second striking aspect of the work of these historians is the place that they assign to political beliefs and ideologies. With the exception of Christopher Bayly, they have very little time for the idea that political ideologies or religious beliefs formed any real part of the calculations of Indian politicians, or actively affected their pursuit of political goals. Political ideas, if they existed at all, are seen as a conscious or unconscious device to conceal the real aim of all political activity, the pursuit of power. Anil Seal describes politics at the local level: 'What seems to have decided political choices in the localities was the race for influence, status and resources'. This was also true at the all-India level: 'On the unsteady base of local squabbles for spoils rested the larger political systems of India: the Justice and the Unionist parties, and the Congress itself, were built out of this rubble'.[7]

6. G. Johnson, op. cit., pp. 1-4.

7. Anil Seal, op. cit., p. 3 and p. 5.

The place that these studies assign to movements of middle and low caste protest in the various provinces of the subcontinent is the third feature which deserves notice. Their treatment of such movements is very much a reflection of their more general perspectives. Conflict in Indian politics is attributed to the factional disputes of elite groups vying for power and position, for the spoils held out by the Raj, and so non-Brahman and low caste movements are seen as yet another expression of this elite conflict, masquerading as real political and ideological belief. In terms of the more general development of Indian politics, such movements are conceived almost as irrelevancies, taking place on the periphery of the crucial areas of political development, the organisational responses to the growing political and administrative structures of the Raj. In his hostile review of Eugene Irschick's study of non-Brahmanism in South India, Christopher Baker argues that 'the real trouble with Dr Irschick's book is that he has not examined the aims of politics, nor the arenas within which they were contained, in early twentieth century South India'. He concludes by disputing the existence of any real large-scale conflict in the Madras presidency.[8]

Gordon Johnson discounts the existence of real caste conflict in the Bombay presidency in the same period. He presents the non-Brahman movement as part of the more general scramble for the spoils of colonial rule:

8. Christopher Baker, review of Eugene Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism 1916-1929. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969, in Modern Asian Studies, 5,3, July 1971, p. 277.

> 'Granted the known hostility in high government circles towards Brahmans, other groups would present themselves as deserving consideration because they were not Chitpavans. What could be simpler in Maharashtra than to mount a non-Brahman campaign? Wrangles about ritual, and a persistent cultural anti-Brahmanism, were long-established features of Maharashtrian society. The case for privileges for non-Brahmans on the make could be bolstered with emotive arguments about centuries of non-Brahman oppression and religious intolerance'.

After his brief discussion of the non-Brahman movement, Johnson concludes: 'It would be fanciful to see in these events evidence of serious caste conflict in Maharashtra, or the formation of a genuine non-Brahman political platform'.[9]

This attempt to find a larger framework within which to make sense of the variety and unevenness of Indian political development in the later nineteenth century raises inescapable questions for the study of non-Brahman movements and ideologies. The first of these concerns the extent to which non-Brahman ideological activity itself conforms to or diverges from this interpretation - whether it can be accomodated within the argument that the real dynamics of Indian politics are to be found in the extensions of the British administration, and the response of Indians to this in the construction of an organisational framework with which to engage the political institutions set up by the Raj. The second question is whether non-Brahman ideology developed out of real caste antagonism within Indian society, and if so, how far this hostility was already present within western Indian society, and how far it was the product of conditions created by British rule. Closely associated with this problem is

9. G. Johnson, op. cit., p. 66.

the question of whether non-Brahman ideologues and polemicists, such as Mahatma Jotirao Phule, the main subject of this study, formed an elite that was in some sense separate from the interest groups which they claimed to represent. If this was so, it becomes necessary to ask if their activity can be distinguished in any real way from that of other elites, or whether, indeed, all such political conflict represented an expression of factional fighting between elite groups, each of whom claimed to represent the 'real' opinions and interests of the people of Maharashtra. The last question concerns the status of non-Brahman ideas as ideology. This raises the perennial problem of political and other ideologies: whether we are to understand them as a veneer put upon more practical material interests, or whether we should accept them in some sense as carrying genuine affect and commitment for those that held them at the same time as they embodied what their protagonists thought to be some vital interest or need.

With a few exceptions, scholarly interest in non-Brahman movements and ideologies has grown up relatively recently, and has focussed primarily upon conflicts between Brahmans and other castes in the Madras and Bombay presidencies. For the former, we have Eugene Irschick's work mentioned above,[10] and the work by Marguerite Ross Barnett on the politics and ideology of Tamil nationalism.[11] For the Bombay presidency, Gail Omvedt's work on the non-Brahman movement between 1873 and 1930 has been of great value in opening up a very large new field for western scholars, and bringing their

10. E. Irschick, op. cit., p. 12.

11. Marguerite Ross Barnett, The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India, Princeton University Press, 1976.

attention to a very large and neglected section of Maharashtrian society.[12] This study owes a great deal to the basic lineaments of non-Brahman political and ideological activity set out in this work. In recent years, interest has also grown in movements that were often associated with, or offshoots from, non-Brahman ideologies - those amongst untouchable castes in the different provinces of late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. What usually distinguished these movements was their perception of all caste Hindus, rather than merely Brahmans, as the supporters of the oppressive hierarchies of caste. Pioneering work here has been done by Eleanor Zelliot for the Bombay presidency,[13] and by Mark Juergensmeyer for the Punjab.[14]

The present study shares much in common with these, and could not have been written without the information and interpretations which they have provided. It also has its own different emphasis. This derives from what I have felt to be a basic and primary need in the study of non-Brahman ideology and politics, which is not always

12. Gail Omvedt, Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930. Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay 1976.

13. Eleanor Zelliot, 'Learning the Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra' in Rajni Kothari, (Ed.) Caste in Indian Politics, Orient Longman, New Delhi 1970, and 'Religion and Legitimation in the Mahar Movement' in Bardwell Smith (Ed.), Religion and Legitimation in South Asia, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1978.

14. Mark Juergensmeyer, Religion as Social Vision: The Movement Against Untouchability in 20th-Century Punjab. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982. This thesis does not, however, address itself directly to the political and ideological activity of untouchables in Maharashtra, because these formed a slightly different issue and area of concern for the main subject of the thesis, Mahatma Jotirao Phule.

met in the existing secondary works. This is to explore in detail the actual content of ideology, the ideas and arguments that non-Brahmans themselves put forward to rally popular support to their belief in the oppressiveness of Brahmanic religious values, and the evil effects of the latter upon the lower castes in the nineteenth century. This study is based on the assumption that we can can learn much more about the real origins of non-Brahman politics and ideology, and the social context which shaped them, by examining the actual content of non-Brahman ideas, than by passing straight to a ready-made set of political and economic interests supposed to have been the 'real' force behind them. Such interests themselves cannot be properly understood outside the ideological context in which they were articulated. The main part of this study is therefore devoted to a detailed exposition of the ideas and arguments of the first leader and most influential theoretician of the movement of lower caste protest in nineteenth century Maharashtra, Mahatma Jotirao Phule. These are first set within their broader social context, and shown in their relationship to the new influences associated with British rule.

Two further points should be clarified here. The first concerns my use of the term 'non-Brahman'. As a general rule, I have referred to the period of ideological and political activity that culminated in the formation of the first political organisation of the lower castes - the Satyashodhak Samaj, or 'Truth-Seeking Society', founded by Phule and his colleagues in 1873 - simply as one of low caste protest. I have used the term 'non-Brahman' for the period after 1880, when a much greater degree of ideological and

organisational diversity set in, when an 'umbrella' term like 'non-Brahman' becomes more appropriate.

The second point concerns the arguments that will be used here about the 'origins' of new ideologies such as those that informed the work of Phule and his colleagues. To talk about the 'origins' of an idea or movement is to talk both about the conditions which caused them, and those which gave them their peculiar shape or means of expression. For the former, it is necessary to take into account not only what their protagonists themselves say prompted them to action, but also motives which they may have concealed deliberately, and larger social forces of which they may not have been aware. In explaining the first of these, it may be possible in some cases to say that what they said was true - that the external conditions cited as the cause did actually exist. This would, of course, still leave us with the much more difficult task of understanding how these objective conditions were incorporated into a larger ideological scheme, and why these, and not others, should suddenly have assumed a new importance. This bears upon our understanding of the origins of Phule's ideas. One of his main arguments was that the lower castes were acutely disadvantaged under British rule because Brahmans occupied a proportion of administrative and professional positions in the lower levels of the British administration far in excess of their numerical proportion within the population as a whole. This then formed the basis of many of his other ideas about the nature of Brahman power: that Brahmans used their secular powers to protect the

orthodox religious values with which they identified, or to aggrandise their own personal positions in some more material way. What I would like to argue here is that the second and third statements here require a different kind of explanation from the first. Phule's contention about the proportions of Brahmans in the British administration in the period in which he wrote does have a clearly identifiable basis in objective reality, which emerges in many different studies of the period.[15] The second and third statements might well have had some objective basis, but this is by no means obvious, and as clearly polemical statements, they are better understood in the quite different context of Phule's belief in the conspiratorial nature of all Brahman activities.

We turn now to a brief biographical account of Phule's life and career, so that details that arise in the course of the analysis that follows will be comprehensible to the reader.

15. See, for example, Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the later Nineteenth Century. Cambridge University Press, 1968. A revealing set of figures given by Seal, that of the caste of persons employed in the executive and judicial branches of the Uncovenanted Service in the Bombay Presidency - the elite of the Indian administrative hierarchy - shows that of the 384 persons employed in this capacity, 328 were Hindus, of which 211 were Brahmans, 26 Ksatriyas, 37 Prabhus, 38 Vaishyas or Banias, 1 Sudra, and 15 others. The categories used here confuse the jati with the varna grouping and are no doubt very crude, but the figures do give an indication of the relative proportion of Brahmans to Sudras, the category with which Phule would have been concerned. Seal, p. 118.

Chapter Two

Mahatma Jotirao Phule

The Mali caste, to which Phule's family belonged, were gardeners by profession. They made their living in western Maharashtra cultivating fruit, flowers and vegetables, often using a network of kin connections to transport their produce to market and sell it. The Malis ranked as Sudra in the four-fold varna scheme, although in the local caste hierarchy they appear to have occupied quite a respectable position, roughly equivalent to that of Maharashtra's large grouping of peasant, landholding and cultivating castes, the Maratha-kunbis.

Phule's grandfather, Setiba, the son of a petty village official near Satara, reduced the once prosperous family to poverty, and they moved to Pune, where the family began to make a living cultivating and selling their produce. The family's services recommended them to the peshwa, Bajirao II, and he engaged them to supply the Court with flowers. He conferred on them thirty-five acres of inam land, on which no tax was payable. Phule's father, Govindrao, set up a greengrocer's shop in Pune. He married one Chimnabai, the daughter of Zagade Patil, a Mali family of Kavadi village near Pune. Two sons were born to the family, of which Jotirao, born in 1827, was the younger.[1]

Phule was educated firstly at a local village school, and then at a school in Pune run by missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland. He was married when he was about thirteen, to Savitribai, of the same family as his mother. He remained at school until his late teens, with a break of three years, during which he helped his family in the fields. From

1. These details about Phule's family are taken from Dhananjay Keer, Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 1-3.

1848, when he would have been twenty-one, he undertook a number of practical social campaigns against what he saw as the evil effects of Brahmanic religious values upon the lower castes, untouchables and women. Between 1848 and 1855 he and a small number of schoolfriends established some small schools for these social groups, whose education was forbidden, at least in theory, in conventional Hindu religious belief. The schools were supported mainly by private charity, and their existence was always precarious. Both Phule and his wife taught in the schools. In 1849, the pressure of conventional public opinion in Pune, outraged by Phule's lack of respect for conventional religious principles, impelled his father to ask the couple to leave the family home, and so, Phule said, 'I was compelled to engage in business to gain a livelihood'.[2] In 1854, he also took a part-time job at one of the Scottish Mission schools in Pune. In the following year, he opened a night school for cultivators and their wives , holding it nightly for two hours in his house. In the same year he wrote a play, The Third Eye, which described how the ignorance of a cultivator made him an easy prey for exploitation by Brahman priests. The play was not published, having been rejected by the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, which had been recently set up to encourage vernacular literature. Phule disapproved strongly of the Indian rebellion of 1857, regarding it as the work of self-interested Brahmans, for which the lower castes, such as the followers of the rebel leader, Tatya Tope, were made to suffer.[3] His increasing radicalism over the issue of specifically Brahman responsibility for the sufferings of the

2. Bombay Gazette 16 December 1853, quoted in D. Keer, op. cit., p. 27. We are told by his great-nephew that Phule had been left some money by his mother, which he invested in a sugar-cane field, and a metal-work shop in Pune. Gajananrao Phule to P.S. Patil, Bombay 25 April 1930, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

3. See, for example, his comments in his work Slavery, published in 1873: D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 124.

lower castes brought him into conflict with the Committee that managed the schools set up earlier, and he left the Committee in 1858.

In the 1860's, Phule devoted himself both to causes of social reform, and to further writing, in which he attempted to construct an ideological basis for the rejection of orthodox Brahmanic religion and the social hierarchies associated with it. In March 1860, he assisted at the remarriage of a widow of the Senavi caste.[4] In 1863, he founded an orphanage at Pune, where young widows who had strayed from the austere and celibate existence enjoined upon them by conventional Hinduism and become pregnant, could deliver their children in secret, and leave them in care, and so lessen the rate of infanticide.[5] In 1868, Phule opened his well to untouchables. In the next five years, he published three works: A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji and Priestcraft Exposed in 1869, and Slavery in 1873. This ability to pay for the publication of his books may have been a reflection of Phule's growing prosperity in the 1860's. His metal-work shop in Pune did well.[6] During the same period, he also set up the 'Poona Commercial and Contracting Company', which carried out lucrative government contracts, supplying materials for barracks, bridges, tunnels and dams.

In 1873, he and his colleagues founded the Satyashodhak Samaj, the 'Truthseeking Society'. This Society worked to combat all aspects of Brahman power, from the religious to that which Brahmans derived

4. See Dhananjay Keer, op. cit., p. 86.

5. Phule's great-nephew, Gajananrao, tells us that the orphanage had about thirty-five children in it, but that almost all of them died before the age of six. Gajananrao Phule to P.S. Patil, Bombay 25 April 1930, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library , Kolhapur.

6. The son of one of Phule's farm managers recalled that Phule's shop did a great trade in all kinds of metals, that it employed two servants, and had a daily turnover of about a hundred rupees. M.S. Vaghole to P.S. Patil, Pune 18 November 1940, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

from their positions in the British administration. Between 1876 and 1882, Phule was nominated as a Commissioner of the Pune Municipality, where he distinguished himself mainly by his opposition to the opening of new liquor shops in Pune. During the 1870's, he expanded his business interests, in 1878 purchasing land near the Mulamutha dam, and using piped water to make it into a large orchard. He also hoped to persuade the local cultivators of the benefits of using piped water.[7]

Much of his time in the early 1880's was taken up with the effort to spread Satyashodhak doctrines and practices to the smaller towns and villages of western Maharashtra. With his colleagues, he undertook extensive lecture tours, organising boycotts of Brahmans and money-lenders, and encouraging cultivators and the lower castes to perform their own religious rituals. He also fought a long legal case, that went right to the High Court in Bombay, over the right of Satyashodhaks to perform marriage ceremonies without giving the Brahman priest his usual fee. In May 1888, his followers in Bombay held a meeting to celebrate his work, at which the title of 'Mahatma' was first suggested. At the same time, pressure among his followers for some uniform system of religious belief was growing, and so he wrote the Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak, 'A Book of True Religion for All'. This was published after his death in 1890. Phule died almost penniless, so that his followers had to appeal to Sayajirao, the Maharaja of Baroda, to make some provision for his wife and adopted son, Yasavantrao.

7. Govind Ganpat Kale, who worked as a clerk for Phule in the last years of the latter's life, recalled that Phule had about sixty acres, fifteen to twenty bullocks, and about a dozen employees. Govind Ganpat Kale to P.S. Patil, Hadapasar, 21 November 1940, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

Chapter Three.

From warrior traditions to nineteenth century politics: structure, ideology and identity in the Maratha-kunbi caste complex in nineteenth century Maharashtra.

1. Introduction.

Relatively little is known about the internal structure and traditional culture of Maharashtra's most important peasant castes before British administrators began to make systematic records at the end of the century. Central to the problem is the term 'Maratha' itself, both as an actual social category, and as the expression of a set of attributes and values with which groups might identify themselves as they laid claim to a Maratha status. The traditional social meaning of this term is not clear, and we have little concrete idea of the groups claiming the name and the social purposes that such a claim served, or of the social composition of those commonly accepted as Marathas.[1]

It seems certain that the life and career of Sivaji in the seventeenth century helped invest the term with some of its significance. The Maratha military conquests and the enormous expansion of their power that took place under Sivaji's leadership associated

1. Some details of this area of social structure in the early nineteenth century are in Sudha V. Desai, Social Life in Maharashtra under the peshwas, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1980, pp. 30-61, and R. Kumar, Western India in the Nineteenth Century, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1968, pp. 1-42.

the term in popular culture with great military prowess.[2] At the same time Sivaji's own quest for a recognition of the Rajput descent, and the Ksatriya varna status of the Bhosale family of Satara, points to the association of the Maratha identity with Ksatriya status, and with at least a claim to a genealogical link with the old Rajput families of northern India.[3] It is not clear whether a Maratha status already existed as an object of social aspiration, or was created only during the expansion of Maratha power under Sivaji

2. A good recent history of this period is A.R. Kulkarni, Maharashtra in the Age of Sivaji, Pune 1969.

3. Sivaji based his claim to a Ksatriya status on his family's descent from the Sisode Rajput family of Udepur. There was considerable controversy surrounding his coronation, some sections of Brahman opinion holding that he could claim only a Sudra varna status and could not, therefore, hold the Kingly position of Chatrapati. The Bhosale family was supposed to have been one of ninety-six assal or 'true' Maratha families who could trace their descent from one of the four lineages or vamsa into which Rajput Kings of ancient India had been divided. The names of these ninety-six 'true' Maratha families were often the subject of dispute. To add to the confusion, the same names were also simply adopted by ordinary kunbi or cultivator families. This might either be an example of what the Bombay Gazetteer called 'the general Deccan practice of calling a chief's retainers by their chief's surname' (Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. XXIV. (Kolhapur) Bombay 1886, p. 66), or it might be a deliberate attempt at upward social mobility, to join the narrow circles of elite Maratha families. See the account of Rajput genealogies in James Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, Oxford University Press 1920, pp. 23-45. For an account of the role of this lineage ideology in present-day Maharashtra, see Anthony T. Carter, 'Caste boundaries and the principle of kinship amity: A Maratha caste purana' in Contributions to Indian Sociology, Vol. 9, No.1, 1975.

and after. The emergence of powerful families such as the Holkars of Indore and the Sindes of Gwalior created further complexities in the term.[4] On one hand the exploits of these families undoubtedly contributed to the association of the Maratha identity with military heroism. On the other hand, although a part of the broader caste complex, neither family could assert a tradition of genealogical linkage with the Rajput lineages.

Despite these difficulties of evidence, it is possible to reconstruct the identity that came to be associated with the term 'Maratha' as a specific social status and a focus for loyalty in traditional popular culture, and to trace the changes that it underwent under the impact of British rule during the nineteenth century. Prior to that, there existed amongst all social groups a diffuse consciousness of, and pride in, the military glories of Sivaji and his successors, of the peshwas of the eighteenth century, and of the families that emerged as independent rulers during the same period. One of the most potent sources for the focus of mass popular loyalty lay in the part played in the early victories by Sivaji's army of men from the maval, the mountainous territory to the west of Pune from which Sivaji organised his early campaigns.[5] Memories

4. The Sinde and Holkar families were the two most powerful sardars to emerge under the leadership of the successors of Sivaji in the first decades of the eighteenth century. The Sindes were originally from an obscure family within the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes. The Holkars were dhangars, or shepherds, by caste.

5. These men were known as mavalis, and were drawn from a variety of fairly low castes, but would have been mainly ordinary kunbis or cultivators.

of this were celebrated in Maharashtra's oral tradition, in particular the pavada ballad form that preserved the memory of the military exploits of the Marathas. This strengthened the association of western Indian society with rulership and martial prowess in popular culture, and helped create corresponding identities and symbols for the attraction of popular loyalty. However, this awareness of the glories of the past did not make any deliberate distinction between Brahmans and non-Brahmans. The deeds of heroic individuals from all social groups formed the subject for celebration. The term 'Maratha' was very loosely applied to denote those who fought under the leadership of the Rajas of Satara and the peshwas, as much as to distinguish an exclusive social group.

At the same time, there was a distinctive and exclusive clan structure amongst the elite families of the Maratha-kunbi caste complex, with an ideology of Rajput descent and Ksatriya status, at least as early as the end of the eighteenth century. From the descriptions of Sivaji's coronation alone, it seems very probable that this structure and ideology could be traced back to the seventeenth century. It formed the basis for the social distinction between assal or 'pure' families, and the much larger mass of kunbis or common cultivators, whose varna status was generally agreed as Sudra. It is clear, however, that there were mechanisms by which this social distinction could be transcended. Wealthy kunbis could form connections with assal Maratha families, usually by a hypergamous marriage, and the genealogies could always be modified to accommodate new families. This process of upward social mobility was a common feature within the caste complex, certainly from the end of the eighteenth century and probably before.

The social application of the term 'Maratha', and the symbolism associated with it were to change radically during the second half of the nineteenth century. The term itself and the traditions associated with it became the subject of intense controversy, as different social groups strove to assert their claims to social leadership through the re-interpretation of their roles in Maharashtra's history and culture. The conduct of such rivalries, in the guise of controversies about the nature of Maharashtra's traditions, became a marked feature of much of the political debate of the late nineteenth century. Lokamanya Tilak's projection of the figure of Sivaji was as a symbol of the unity and independence of all Maharashtra. Against this, non-Brahman polemicists struggled both to identify the symbol of rulership and martial heroism more strongly with a specifically 'Maratha' social group, and to link this identity exclusively with non-Brahmans, and often with a much wider range of non-Brahman social groups than the term would have been commonly applied to earlier in the century.

This attempt to trace a link between earlier identities and those that were created in the non-Brahman polemic of the late nineteenth century is not to posit a simple continuity between the two. The example of Maratha identity is above all a reminder that ethnic identities never exist in a fixed state, a racial'given', but should be studied as social phenomena always in flux. Phule's own attempts to project a community of all non-Brahman castes meant that the self-consciously lower caste and non-Brahman identity that emerged in his writing went far beyond anything present in popular culture in the early nineteenth century. From a local tradition

of rulership and martial prowess, and a status associated with a small elite of Maratha families, Phule attempted to create an identity for all of Maharashtra's non-Brahman castes that portrayed them as its rightful social leaders and the inheritors of its cultural traditions.[6]

Very little is known, at least in the case of western India, about the significance of the all-India varna scheme for the relationships between caste groups in local society, and for the construction of caste identities in the local and regional contexts, in the early part of the nineteenth century.[7] This chapter will argue that claims to a varna status did not only have implications in the sphere of ritual, but were also used as a way of making directly political assertions concerning the right to social leadership and authority within Hindu society. Elite Maratha claims to a Ksatriya varna status provoked a major dispute in Satara with orthodox Brahman opinion, in the 1820's and 1830's. This dispute illustrates the political dimension of the assertion of a Ksatriya status, and allows us to see how later non-Brahman claims to a Ksatriya status for all lower castes made a deliberate link with this political dimension of earlier Maratha efforts.

6. I am grateful to Professor Richard Fox for an illuminating discussion on the question of ethnic identities, and for allowing me to see his unpublished paper, 'Ethnicity as a consequence', written with V. Dominguez.

7. One of the few studies of the significance of varna schemes in this period is N.K. Wagle, 'A Dispute between the Pancal Devajna Sonars and the Brahmins of Pune regarding Social Rank and Ritual Privileges: A Case-Study of the British Administration of Jati Laws in Maharashtra, 1822-1825' in N.K. Wagle (Ed), Images of Maharashtra, Curzon Press, London 1980, pp. 129-159.

2. The pavada tradition: oral history and popular culture.

The difficulty of finding information about the attributes and symbolism of the Maratha identity in traditional popular culture has already been mentioned. One possible source for this lies in Maharashtra's rich oral tradition, heard in its ballad singing. The pavada was almost always an historical ballad, celebrating the deeds of past heroes. They were usually sung at village entertainments, and appear to have had a very wide circulation at the level of village society. They were sung and transmitted orally from father to son by Gondhalis, the bards and ballad singers of Maharashtra.[8] A pavada might recount the deeds of mythological figures like Rama and Malhari, of very ancient heroes like Vikram, or of figures from much more recent episodes in Maratha history, such as the exploits of Sivaji and his successors.[9]

It was not until 1890, however, that any attempt was made to collect and write down some of these ballads. A British administ-

8. For information about the Gondhalis, see R.E. Enthoven, Tribes and Castes of Bombay, Bombay 1920, Vol i, pp. 13-17, and P.B. Josi, 'On the Gondhalis, a class of Maratha bards' in Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol i, no. 6, 1887. From the seventeenth century, Gondhalis were associated with the worship of Amba Bhavani of Tuljapur, the kuladevata or patron goddess of Sivaji's family, whose increasing popularity amongst Hindus formed a part of the contemporary strengthening of Hindu feeling against Mughal rule.

9. For information on Maharashtra's pavada tradition, see M.N. Sahasrabuddhe, The Work of the Marathi Ballad Singers, Pune 1961 (Marathi), pp. 13-15 and 209-214, which describes the kinds of subjects that traditional and more modern pavadas might take, and Ashok Ranade, 'The Pavada' in D. Mukhopadhyay (Ed.), Lesser Known Performing Arts in India Sterling Publications, Delhi 1978, pp. 58-63, which describes how the grammatical and phonetic construction of pavadas designed them deliberately to be sung rather than spoken, and sung to a musical rhythm adapted to a mass and unsophisticated audience.

rator, Harry Arbuthnot Acworth, the president of the Bombay Anthropological Society, and his Marathi assistant, Sankar Tukaram Saligram, set about finding Gondhalis who could recite ballads, which they then recorded. Much of the work was done while Acworth was Political Agent at Satara in 1887.[10]

We will take for detailed examination the ballad of Tanaji Malusre, one of the longest recorded by Acworth, running to thirty printed pages, and dealing with a very popular episode from the Sivaji period: the capture of Sinhagad fort by Malusre and a small handful of mavalis, against enormous odds. While the ballad makes no attempt to claim Maratha victories as the work of any single group, there is nevertheless a particular pride in the role of the common man, and especially of the humble mavali in Sivaji's armies,

10. H.A. Acworth, Historical Pavadas, Bombay 1890 (Marathi), pp. ix-xi . Acworth also published a translation of some of them in a separate volume, The Ballads of the Marathas, London 1894. A wide range of episodes and social groups are represented in the ballads recorded by Acworth, including events as recent as the dismissal of Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara, by the British in 1839, and his suffering and exile in Banaras. This obvious modernity of some of the ballads which Acworth recorded points to the difficulty of using them as any sort of evidence for traditional popular culture. Acworth himself certainly assumes that those he recorded in the 1880's were composed at a considerably earlier date, usually shortly after the events to which they refer. While it is likely that some version of the ballads he recorded was composed in this way, there is no guarantee that the ballads were not subsequently modified in the process of transmission. More work needs to be done on the ballads, and on dating them through their linguistic constructions before they can be reliably used as evidence. What I have done here is to take one of the few whose history and authorship is documented: the ballad of Tanaji Malusre, Sivaji's childhood friend and comrade in battle, composed by the ballad singer Tulsidas at Sivaji's request, after the death of Tanaji in battle. M.N. Sahasrabudde dates this particular ballad back to the Sivaji period: M.N.Sahasrabuddhe, op. cit., p. 214.

the lowly cultivator or landholder in times of peace, who could also prove himself valiant in battle. There is another element that foreshadows later non-Brahman attempts to identify Maratha victories with the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes, and which provided a precedent for claims like Phule's to a Ksatriya status for all lower castes on the basis of the warrior traditions of the Marathas. The armies of Sivaji and his successors are sometimes referred to as 'brave Ksatriyas' or 'the race of Ksatriyas'. This held nothing like the deliberate political consciousness of later non-Brahman ideology. It was more simply a reflection of the immediate calling of Sivaji's troops, and of the feeling that a brave man, whether mavali, kunbi, Koli or Mahar, could for a time rank himself with the most famous Ksatriya heroes of Hindu history.

The story of the ballad is romantic and heavily embroidered. But the point here is not the strict historical accuracy of the ballad, but its role as a vehicle for the expression of a local ethnic identity through its invocation of the Maratha past and the heroic deeds of the humble cultivator and small landowner. The ballad of Tanaji Malusre was ideal for this purpose. Having defeated Sivaji in a game of dice, his mother, Jijabai, asked for the fort of Sinhagad, then controlled by a very strong Rajput garrison under the famous warrior Udebhan, as her prize. Sivaji despatched his childhood friend and most able supporter, Tanaji Malusre, with a force of twelve thousand local men, to take the fort. Tanaji penetrated the fort's defences by sending a large lizard over the walls with a rope tied around its waist. With fifty of his men, he had reached the interior of the fort, when the rope gave way, cutting them off inside.

They slew nine hundred Pathans by surprise raids on the outposts of the fort before the alarm was raised. Not deigning to take up arms in person against this small force of humble peasants, Udebhan sent against them his great elephant named Chandravali, his lieutenant, and finally his twelve sons, all of whom Tanaji slew. Udebhan then challenged him in person, killing him after a great struggle.

The ballad described, with much effect, the army of twelve thousand peasants, mustered by the Maratha sardars whom Tanaji had summoned to his aid:

'Oh how they came, those men
Eager to strike at the enemy's flag
Twelve thousand people, without weapons
An army with empty hands
How were they to go without defences
Tanaji was watching them
Twelve thousand had come, unarmed
At their waists scythes and sickles
Rough blankets to cover their heads
A club in each one's hand
They bowed to the subedhar in greeting.' 11

Even Tanaji came from humble peasant stock. The mahat of the elephant Chandravali taunted him with his peasant origins and urged him to drop his sword, ill-fitting the hand of a kunbi:

'Tell me, sir, whom do you serve?'
'Sivaji Maharaj is my lord
I am Tanaji Subedhar
Tell me, where are your nine hundred men
Nine hundred Pathans we have slain'
The mahat replied to the subedhar
'Such great words, from the mouth of a kunbi's brat
You should go back to your fields
You should be cutting up wood
And binding it into bundles to sell' 12

11. H.A. Acworth, Historical Ballads, p. 31. (Marathi)
I have made a translation of the Marathi version, rather than using Acworth's English translation.

12. ibid., p. 49.

The pavada also identified Tanaji's mavali army both as Maratha and Ksatriya. The reference to the soldiers as Marathas reflected the feeling that a man's identity as a Maratha came from his bravery in battle; to be a Maratha was to fight. To be a Maratha in this sense was not a specific social status on the level of jati interaction, but a matter of a much broader loyalty to the symbols and attributes of a local ethnic identity. Tanaji declared as he urged the lizard up the walls of the fort 'I am the son of a Maratha; I am not afraid to die'.[13]

As each of Tanaji's lieutenants demanded first place in scaling the rope into the fort, their names are recited: Mohite, Dhag, Cavan, Jadhav, Gaikwad, Sirke and Mahadik.[14] This emphasis on names reminds us again of the ambivalence of the term 'Maratha' in traditional popular culture. As already stated, the term was at one level loosely associated with a set of symbols and attributes that acted as a focus for popular loyalty and identification. At another level, the term referred to the elite families of the Maratha-kunbi complex, to distinguish assal Marathas claiming Ksatriya status from kunbi families acknowledging membership of the Sudra varna. In repeating these names, the pavada both made the association between Maratha families, and the qualities of martial heroism and leadership, and called upon the loyalty of popular audiences, many of whom might themselves possess such names.

The pavada also identified Tanaji and his forces as Ksatriya.

13. H.A. Acworth, Historical Ballads, p. 44.

14. ibid., p. 45.

When his uncle warns him against attempting Sinhagad, he replies:

'Do not speak thus, uncle
We are brave Ksatriyas
We do not fear death'. 15

Beneath the walls of Sinhagad, Tanaji performed the ritual of throwing down the vida, the roll of betel leaves to be picked up by whoever dared to take up the challenge to enter the fort first:

'If there is a man with courage, a brave Ksatriya here, 16
He should pick up the leaf and take the rope in his hands.

The pavada included other elements in which a popular loyalty to traditions of martial heroism might have been expressed. It recited lists of place names in western Maharashtra, so that the latter was almost physically conjured up for the listener, in the days of its greatest glory. Sivaji recounts the forts in his possession, the dominating features of the landscape of western Maharashtra, and invites Jijabai to choose any she likes:

'There are twenty-seven forts under my rule
Ask for any and I will give it
At the pass between the hills, at Nasik, at Savantvadi,
The forts of Tunga and Tikona
The strongholds at Laghugad and Visapur' 17

The listener is reminded of Sivaji's other great forts, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratagad, Javali, Rohida, Purandar, Torana and Lohagad, familiar parts of the mental geography of every local man and evocative symbols of the days of Maratha greatness.

15. H.A. Acworth, Historical Ballads, p. 30.

16. ibid., p. 44.

17. ibid., p. 27.

The pavada finishes with an invocation to Tanaji almost as the representative of a golden age, whose memory alone brings a blessing in less auspicious times:

'A pavada for a great and brave hero
Those who would be great should listen to it
A brave warrior in the kingdom of Sivaji
There will not be another like him
To hear his song alone conveys a blessing
A song from the satyayuga is sung in the kaliyuga
A lord of twenty-seven forts went out to fight
We will never see his like again. ' 18

3. The Marathi bakhars.

Another early source of information about this area of social tradition consists in the Marathi bakhar, the accounts of Maratha history written during the eighteenth century. The real dates and authorship of these are often uncertain, but most of them were written between 1700 and 1800.[19] A bakhar was generally written at the request of a particular patron, and the most usual subjects for them were the lives of Maratha rulers, histories of prominent Maratha families, and accounts of the major battles fought by the Maratha armies. The custom of commissioning the writing of bakhar may reflect a similar identification with the past, as described at the beginning of this chapter, in the smaller circles of elite Maratha families.

18. H.A. Acworth, Historical Ballads, pp.60-61. The ballad then finishes by describing how Sivaji had the ballad-singer, Tulsidas, summoned to Raigad, and paid him a thousand rupees to write a ballad celebrating the courage of the hero Tanaji. H.A. Acworth, Historical Ballads, p. 60.

19. For further details of the Marathi bakhars, see R.V. Heravadakar, Marathi Bakhar, Venus Prakashan, Pune 1957, (Marathi).

The term 'Maratha' has, in the bakhar examined here, neither the prominence nor the self-conscious attachment to a specific social group, with which we are familiar from its use in the later nineteenth century. When they use the term at all, it is generally in collective fashion to denote all those Marathi speakers, both Brahman and non-Brahman, who fought in the armies of Sivaji and his successors. However, it does seem possible to see an increasingly specific use of the term in the bakhar written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and these seem to distinguish more clearly between Brahman and Maratha social groups.

The Sabhasadaci bakhar was probably the first of the histories written about the Sivaji period.[20] It is largely an account of the life of Sivaji, and does not often use the term 'Maratha'. Its only mention of Maratha social structure occurs during the description of Sivaji's coronation:

> 'It was thought that Sivaji ought to become the ruler of the Marathas, and that he should be honoured as a king. All the important people were summoned, and after consideration they agreed to this. Then the bhat Gosavis told him to sit on the throne. Concerning the king's lineage, it was determined that he was a pure Kshatriya,' from a house of the Sisodes who had come down from the north. The bhats had previously decided that the thread ceremony should be performed in the same way as it was for the Ksatriyas of the north, and did for him the thread ceremony of a Ksatriya king'. 21

20. The Sabhasadaci bakhar was written fourteen years after Sivaji's death, by Krsnaji Anant Sabhasad, at the request of Sivaji's son, Rajaram, and completed in 1697: A.R. Kulkarni, op. cit., p. 10.

21. S.N. Josi (Ed.) Krsnaji Anant Sabhasad: The History of Chatrapati Raja Sivaji, Pune 1960, (Marathi), p. 80.

The Bhausahebaci bakhar, written at the end of the eighteenth century, used the term 'Maratha' more frequently, and made some distinction between Brahmans and other Marathi speakers. It referred specifically to the occupations of Marathas: 'The trade of the Marathas is guerilla warfare'.[22] It distinguished clearly between Brahmans and Marathas, referring to 'all the important Brahman and Maratha sardars, great and small'.[23] At the same time, the term is used in its collective sense, to describe the Marathas as a military power: 'From this point the Maratha power grew, and from then the Marathas never flinched'.[24] The writer tells us that 'in this way the ancient Marathi dharma was continued'.[25] This is significant, firstly in its reference to a distinctive Maharashtrian tradition, and secondly in its use of the term 'Marathi' rather than 'Maratha'. The writer seems to be using it as an adjective to describe all Marathi speakers, and thus distinguishing it from the more specific social application of the term to elite Maratha families.

This usage is certainly to be found in one of the very latest bakhar, the Citnisi bakhar, probably written in the second decade of the nineteenth century. This is an account of the lives of Sambhaji amd Rajaram.[26] When Citnis used the term 'Maratha' he made a definite distinction between its collective and its specific social

22. Y.M. Pathan (Ed.), Bhausahebaci bakhar, Solapur 1959. (Marathi), p. 13. This bakhar covers the period of Maratha campaigns in the ten years before the battle of Panipat in 1761. Its author is not known.

23. ibid., p. 97.

24. ibid., p. 133.

25. ibid., p. 138.

26. Sambhaji and Rajaram were the sons of Sivaji.

applications. He referred to 'the marvellous powers of the Marathi armies' and 'the Marathi forces'[27] but to marathe saradaraci sarfaraji, 'the commendation of the Maratha sardars'.[28] The comparison here is not exact, because a Maratha sardar might also be a Brahman, upon whom a title and estates had been conferred for his services to one of the Maratha princes or their ministers.[29] But this would still denote what was in effect an elite social group with a tradition of military service alongside the specifically Maratha families.

These usages follow those of the pavada examined above. The term 'Maratha' had some of the symbolism, but none of the specific social application or the sensitivity as a social issue that it had acquired by the last decades of the nineteenth century. But there does seem evidence that the usage of the term was becoming more specific by the first decades of that century.

4. Ksatriya or Sudra? The disputes in early nineteenth century Satara.

The 1820's and 1830's saw a long drawn out and bitter quarrel in western Maharashtra between a party of orthodox Citpavan Brahmans and the elite Maratha families of Satara, led by the Chatrapati Pratapsinh Bhosale of Satara, who had been nominally restored to the position of Chatrapati by the British government in 1818, after

27. R.V. Heravadakar, (Ed.), Malhar Ramarao Citnis, The History of Chatrapati Maharaja Sambhaji and the elder Maharaja Rajaram Pune 1972, pp. 31-32.

28. ibid., p. 55.

29. Examples of these would be the Patwardhans of Sangli or the Pant Sachiv of Bhor.

the defeat of the last peshwa, Bajirao II. The Maratha families claimed a Rajput descent, a Ksatriya status and Vedic rituals, while the Brahman party denied that there were any true Ksatriyas left in the present age. They referred to the myth of Parasuram's extirpation of all Ksatriyas on the earth, and argued that since there were no intermediate varnas between that of Brahman and Sudra, none but the former were entitled to Vedic rituals.[30] This dispute illuminates the strong political dimension to traditional Maratha claims to Ksatriya status; shows how these may have been affected by the onset of British rule from 1818; and also provides much information about the internal structure of the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes in the early nineteenth century.

The progressive loss of the real power of the Maratha Chatrapatis to their Citpavan Brahman ministers culminated in the reduction of the Chatrapati almost to the position of a prisoner in the hands of the peshwa, held under restraint at the fort of Satara, after the death of Sahu I in 1749. Sahu II, the father of Pratapsinh, hoped that he might be allowed a more active political role than that of simply conferring the office of the peshwaship. However, the long reign of Nana Phadnis saw no improvement in the family's position, and there is evidence that this gave rise to considerable bitterness. Chatarsinh, brother of Sahu II and uncle of Pratapsinh, was especially bitter at the disunity amongst the Maratha powers, and dreamed of

30. Parasuram, the sixth incarnation of Visnu, was said to have attacked all Ksatriyas twenty-one times, thus wiping them from the face of the earth. For an account of this myth, see J.Dowson, A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1968, pp. 230-231.

reuniting them into an effective force against the British.[31] Sahu II died in May 1808, and was succeeded by Pratapsinh. When Bajirao II's relations with the British deteriorated to the point of open war, he removed Pratapsinh and his family from Satara to the more idolated fort of Vasota. The Chatrapati fell into British hands after the battle of Ashta in February 1818. In April of the same year, the Bombay government installed Pratapsinh as Chatrapati, with James Grant (later James Grant Duff, the historian) as Resident, with responsibility for training Pratapsinh in public administration, and Mountstuart Elphinstone's confidential agent, Balajipant Natu, as his assistant.[32] The Bombay government's aim in setting up a small state of Satara ruled by the Raja was, as Elphinstone described, 'to afford an honourable maintenance to the representative of the ancient princes of this country, and to establish among the Mahrattas a counterpoise to the remaining influence of the former Bramin government'.[33]

At a very early stage, however, Pratapsinh showed a strong desire to assert his authority as Chatrapati. John Briggs, Grant's

31. I have taken this account from G.S. Sardesai, A New History of the Marathas, Phoenix Publications, Bombay 1968, Vol.iii pp. 503-504.

32. Balajipant Natu, a Citpavan Brahman of the powerful Natu family in Pune, had served the Raste family before becoming Elphinstone's agent, and typified the generation of administrative and professional servants of the old regime who were able to use their skills to serve the British. See K.A. Ballhatchet. Social Policy and Social Change in Western India 1817-1830, Oxford University Press 1957, pp. 93-94.

33. M. Elphinstone to J. Grant, 8 April 1818, quoted in R.D. Choksey, The Aftermath 1818-1826, Bombay 1950, p. 255.

successor as Resident at Satara in 1823, reported that:

> 'the Rajah's weak point was an exaggerated notion of his hereditary dignity and consequence, and of his rightful claims as representative head of the Mahratta empire in its brief period of triumph. He gloried in the titles of 'Maharajah Chuttraputtee' and 'Hindooput', and always alluded to the Peishwas, especially the last, Bajee Rao, as unfaithful servants of his house, who had abused his confidence'. 34

Briggs's last point indicated another aspect of Pratapsinh's attitudes that was to be significant in the disputes of the 1820's and 1830's: his resentment of Brahmans, and especially of the Citpavan peshwas. Briggs observed: 'Against the Brahmins, as the tribe to which the Peishwas belonged, this unfortunate Prince, though he could not help employing a good many of them, entertained an invincible prejudice, amounting almost to hatred'. 35 This dislike broke out into an open quarrel between Pratapsinh and Balajipant Natu, Grant's assistant. The hostility seemed to derive from Pratapsinh's fear that Natu, as Grant's Native Agent, might take too much power into his own hands, and from Natu's concern with his own position as full power was made over to Pratapsinh. Briggs described how

> 'When Captain Grant, just before his own retirement, placed the Rajah in power, Balajee Punt Natoo fully expected to have been made Dewan or minister, but the Rajah dreaded a second Peishwa supported by British authority, and had, moreover, an aversion for the man'. 36

Natu insisted on leaving Satara at Pratapsinh's attainment of full powers, and Grant described his own inability to persuade him to

34. Quoted in Evans Bell, A Memoir of John Briggs of the Madras Army, London 1885, p. 94.

35. ibid., p. 93.

36. ibid., p. 94.

stay: 'Although he will be a great loss to me, I cannot allow him to take the power into his hands which I am bound to deliver over to the Rajah'. Pratapsinh and his mother, Grant reported were 'half mad with joy at his departure'.[37]

There is also some evidence of hostility to the administrative arrangements at Satara, in particular to Pratapsinh's position of tutelage under James Grant, among the Raja's staff. Grant reported two incidents of this kind to Elphinstone. The first occurred when Grant reproached the Raja for having interfered with the proceeding of a pancayat, at which a member of his staff, Dajiba Upadhyaya, taunted Pratapsinh with his having to take orders constantly from the British. The second incident occurred in 1822, after power had been transferred to Pratapsinh, when a cat, firmly bound up, was sent to him addressed to the 'Maharaja Chatrapati' as 'an order from one of the Sahib log to try this prisoner in his Udalat for having killed one of his fowls'. Grant suspected that the sender was Cintamanrao Patwardhan, the Citpavan Brahman jagirdar of Sangli.[38]

British policy, and the British administrators at Satara, were in part responsible for the formation of Pratapsinh's attitudes, both to his own office, and to the Brahman peshwas and their fellow caste-men in Satara. First, there was the deliberate evocation of the position of Sivaji as the legitimate head of the combined Maratha powers in the reinstatement of Pratapsinh

37. J. Grant to M. Elphinstone, 22 October 1819, quoted in K.A. Ballhatchet, op. cit., p. 236.

38. These incidents are described in K.A. Ballhatchet, op. cit., pp. 239-240.

as Chatrapati, by which the Bombay government hoped to draw Maratha loyalties away from the last peshwa. Briggs himself realised that Pratapsinh's sense of his importance as Chatrapati could have been raised in this way: 'There was never, of course, any intention or promise of restoring the extended sovereignty of Sivajee's house, but there was quite enough advantage taken of its old headship for our political purposes at the time to give the Rajah and his personal adherents an uneasy feeling that his full rights had been unduly cut down'.[39]

Besides this deliberate revival of the image of a dominant Chatrapati, British policy almost certainly increased Pratapsinh's sense of resentment at the treatment of his family by the peshwas. The Bombay government's view, often repeated, was that the peshwas had usurped the proper authority of the Maratha Chatrapatis. British administrators in Satara also rapidly developed a set of stereotypes about the relations between Brahmans and Marathas. Grant described what he felt to be the common attitude to Marathas amongst the Brahmans of Satara:

> 'They look upon Mahrattas as little better than monkies with regard to their ever becoming men of business, and the few Mahrattas who have ability in this respect are adduced by them merely as singular instances in their species. Generally speaking even amongst the more intelligent and sensible Bramins they offer their real opinion when praising the wisdom and discernment shown by Shahaji the 4th Rajah in delegating the power of the sovereign to the Peishwas as the only means of repairing an empire which he forsaw would have speedily fallen to pieces in the hands of his posterity'. 40

39. Quoted in Evans Bell, op. cit., p. 98.

40. J. Grant to M. Elphinstone, 23 March 1819, quoted in R.D. Choksey, op. cit., p. 266.

The British emphasis on the administrative ambitions of Brahmans and their contempt for the ability of Marathas almost certainly increased Pratapsinh's suspicion of the Brahmans in his own administration.

It is also very likely that as first Resident in Satara and guardian of the young Pratapsinh, James Grant, in his role as the historian of the Marathas, influenced the young Chatrapati. It was during his years in Satara between 1818 and 1823 that Grant gathered the materials for his History of the Mahrattas, with its emphasis on the glorious exploits of Sivaji in the foundation of an independent Maratha state, and its gradual decline and dissolution in the second half of the eighteenth century under the leadership of the peshwas.[41] After the publication of James Grant Duff's work in 1826, Pratapsinh clearly felt that the work should be read widely amongst the Marathas themselves, and had the book translated into Marathi, although the translation was never printed.[42]

With Pratapsinh's pride in his position, however nominal, as the Chatrapati of all the Marathas, his hostility to the old regime and suspicion of what he regarded as Brahman attempts to revive it,

41. See the introduction by S.M. Edwardes to James Grant Duff, A History of the Mahrattas, Oxford University Press, 1921, Vol. i, pp. xxxiv-xlii for details about Grant Duff's collection of source materials for his history.

42. D.B. Parasnis recorded that 'Maharaja Pratapsing took such keen interest in this work that he had various bakhars and narratives specially written for Grant Duff's assistance, and after the publication of the History of the Mahrattas by Grant Duff, he got it translated into Marathi', D.B. Parasnis, 'Maratha Historical Literature', Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. xxii, 1908, p, 171. The first Marathi translation appeared in 1830, prepared by Captain David Capon: see A.R. Kulkarni, James Cuninghame Grant Duff, Pune 1969, (Marathi) p. 203.

and the evidence of a clash between Pratapsinh and Balajipant Natu, together with more general dissatisfaction amongst Pratapsinh's staff, the stage was set for the conflict over the varna status of the Bhosales and other elite Maratha families.[43]

In M.G. Dongare's account, hostilities between the elite Maratha families of Satara and the Brahman party began around 1820. Between 1820 and 1828 the Brahman party, led by Balajipant Natu, Cintamanrao Patwardhan, and another Citpavan Brahman from Sangli named Nilakanthasastri Thatte, campaigned to limit the authority for Vedic ritual to Brahmans alone.[44]

They prepared new religious texts to support their claims, and brought the Shankaracharaya of Karvir math to Pune and persuaded him to support their interpretations of the traditional histories affecting this issue. They also prepared letters and lists describing their case, endorsed by the Shankaracharaya, and sent them to religious centres all over India. The three Brahman protagonists argued

43. I have taken my material for this dispute from the diaries of Pratapsinh, which have been published as part of the Selections from the Peshwa Daftar, and from an account of the affair written much later, in 1905, from the perspective of the controversy over ritual then current in Kolhapur, by Mahadev Ganesh Dongare. Dongare was a Prabhu, active in the non-Brahman movement in Kolhapur: see Gail Omvedt, Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930, Bombay 1976, p. 128. I have therefore used Dongare's account with caution, balancing it against the material used in the diaries.

44. Nilakanthasastri Thatthe, leader of the Hindu orthodox in Pune, was one of the eminent Brahman religious scholars who was given a salary by the Bombay government, and later employed to advise on judicial procedures in Satara. K.A. Ballhatchet, op. cit., p. 87 and p. 107.

in particular that the most prominent rulers of the Bhosale house, Sivaji, Sambhaji and Sahu, had never been true Ksatriya, and had never received proper Vedic rites.[45] This last claim struck at the heart of Pratapsinh's interpretation of his position as Chatrapati, in that it both denied him the Ksatriya status essential to the validity of his title, and undermined the standing of Sivaji himself as a true Chatrapati, entitled to the obedience of all Marathas, upon which Pratapsinh's own view of his position was based.

Pratapsinh's party meanwhile was active. In 1819-20, emissaries were given a letter from Grant Duff and sent to Udepur to obtain information about the usages of the Ksatriya castes of Rajputana and especially of Mevad, and to ask how information might be found about the genealogical connection between the houses of Udepur and Satara, upon which the Bhosale case to Ksatriya status had been founded at the time of Sivaji. The emissaries informed Pratapsinh that Ranaji, the Maharaja of Udepur, had been unable to give them any detailed information, but confirmed that the Satara family was of the house of the Sisodes of Udepur.[46] In 1822-3, Pratrapsinh was visited by Dipavijay Kaviraj from Udepur, at his own request, and Pratapsinh pressed him for information about his distant ancestors before Babajiram. Kaviraj gave him details about the princely families of Udepur, Satara, Annagondi, Kolhapur, Tanjore, Nagpur, Chittigava, Deulgava and Akalkot.[47] Captain E.W. West, the assistant

45. M.G. Dongare, The Lineage of the Bhosale Family, Kolhapur 1905, (Marathi), p. 3. A copy of this work is in the Jayakar Library, University of Pune.

46. ibid., p. 22-23.

47. ibid., p. 23.

political agent at Kolhapur, also mentions having seen a letter from Pratapsinh to the Governor of Bombay, asking him to procure from Udepur the details of Rajput rites and ceremonies, as he was himself a Rajput and a Ksatriya.[48]

Pratapsinh was not alone in defending the cause of elite Maratha families against the Brahman initiative from Sangli and Pune. On 27 July 1828, Dongare tells us, the Maratha Ksatriya Mandal held a meeting and raised a petition to the Bombay government against the activities of the Brahman party, pointing out that they had circulated seventy-five major religious centres throughout India and deliberately misled people about the existence of the Ksatriya varna in contemporary India, and the religious rites of the Marathas, and asked that these papers should be sent back or destroyed.[49] Pratapsinh himself also had a stake in the admission of the Ksatriya status of elite families other than the Bhosales, since it was with these that the Bhosales interdined and intermarried.

The whole dispute over the Ksatriya status of elite Marathas reached a climax in 1830, when it was decided to hold a public debate to resolve the issue in the Sanskrit school at Satara. Each side appointed a team of learned pandits and the debate went on for several days, each side giving evidence for its cause. On the final day, Brahmans from all over the Deccan and southern Maharashtra came to Satara to hear the verdict. The atmosphere was so tense that Pratapsinh feared for the safety of his own pandits, and brought an

48. E.W. West, 'Are the Marathas Kshatriyas or Sudras?' Indian Antiquary, Vol.3. April 1874, p. 109.

49. M.G. Dongare, op. cit., p. 3.

armed guard to the school to protect them. The verdict of the debate was to confirm the Maratha case.

Amongst the main points of the debate described by Dongare, the following are the most striking:

1. Even though Parasuram tried twenty-one times to remove all Ksatriyas from the earth, still they have never been wiped out.

2. The Ksatriyas that Parasuram failed to kill have never forsaken their Vedic karma.

3. It is a fabrication to say that because all male Ksatriyas were wiped out at the time of Parasuram, their women resorted to Brahmans to beget children, thus breaking down the caste.

4. There cannot be a shortage of Ksatriyas today because two Kings had sprung from the Soma and Suraya lines and found refuge in Badrikasram.

5. In the kaliyug, caste is not decided by usage alone.

6. There is no objection to Ksatriyas who eat meat performing Vedic rituals.

7. Even though, in this yuga, Ksatriyas have eaten the food of Sudras, there is no difficulty regarding Vedic ritual.

8. Even though the proper rites are omitted in some Ksatriya households, still their Vedic karma is unimpaired.

9. It is not the case that the King alone, on account of the Vedic mantras at his coronation, has rights to Vedic ritual; all Ksatriyas have these rights.

10. The houses of Satara, Tanjore, Nagpur and Karvir have the same common origin, and their rites are drawn from the Rgveda.

11. Ksatriyas beyond the Narmada river have rites from the Yajurveda. This is the case in Udepur. The Raja of Satara should therefore adopt the same rites himself.

12. Even though Ksatriyas are accustomed to eating from a single dish amongst their own caste fellows, still this does not disqualify them from Vedic rituals.

13. Even though the surnames of Ksatriyas and Sudras are identical, still there are ways of telling them apart. 50

The first two stages of the Maratha argument were the use of interpretations of puranic mythology to prove the existence of a Ksatriya varna, and the assertion of a genealogical connection between elite Marathas and the Rajput families of northern India whose Ksatriya status was more clearly established. This was a replication of the kinds of arguments that surrounded the coronation of Sivaji; and, like Sivaji, Pratapsinh's success in asserting his position as a true Chatrapati, entitled in principle if not in fact to the obedience of all Hindus in Maharashtra, depended on his ability to manipulate the religious sanctions, especially the proof of varna status, through which the conferment of the title was controlled.

What is also striking about these points is the very evident consciousness of the deviation among elite Maratha families from the ritual and practice appropriate to Ksatriyas. The points here were designed to cover deviations, from the omission of ritual, or the consumption of improper food, to the adoption of the Muslim practice of eating from a single dish, from exploitation by their opponents. The Maratha party were also well aware that the division between themselves and the larger complex of Maharashtra's peasant castes was a very flexible one, and that the genealogies by which

50. M.G. Dongare. The Lineage of the Bhosale Family. pp. 28-30. Some of the practices mentioned by Dongare as having been taken up by the elite Maratha families are clearly the product of Muslim influence, such as that of eating from a single dish amongst caste-fellows.

elite families distinguished themselves were frequently rewritten to accommodate new claimants to a Maratha status. This awareness was reflected in the last point, and perhaps significantly Dongare does not give any details of how the distinction was to be made. The ninth point reflects the influence of elite families other than the Bhosales, anxious that their own case should not depend entirely on the prescriptive right established at the time of Sivaji, although again we are given no details of how else their rights were to be established.

In 1836 Pratapsinh decided to arrange a ceremony of coronation for himself, to be modelled exactly on that of Sivaji. Significantly, there was great difficulty in ascertaining the exact form of the words and ceremonies that had been used for Sivaji, and Pratapsinh had to appoint a team of learned sastris to prepare a ceremony for him, which was carried out in great state in the same year.[51]

The information about the disputes in these crucial two decades, given in Pratapsinh's diaries, confirms Dongare's evidence of a longstanding preoccupation with a Rajput descent, Ksatriya status and Vedic ritual; plus a renewed surge of interest in these symbols of the traditional political authority of the Bhosale family, coupled with a new campaign by orthodox Brahmans in the Deccan against the admission of any but Brahmans to Vedic ritual. The diaries

51. M.G. Dongare. The Lineage of the Bhosale Family. pp. 33-34.

give details of Pratapsinh's exchanges with the Rajput family of Udepur. Pratapsinh managed to arrange the marriage of his daughter with a relative of the Udepur family, and he recorded his pleasure at the acceptance of the robes of honour that he had sent to Udepur at the marriage, signifying the connection between the two families.[52] Another entry showed his gratification at the conventions of the Kachva family of northern India, who were acknowledged as Ksatriya, and who would accept marriage connections only with the ruling families of Satara and Udepur.[53]

The diary recorded Pratapsinh's anxiety that the Bhosales should have the same ritual practices as the Udepur Rajputs. Part of the same conversation reveals another aspect of the political dimension of ritual, as a reflection of the immediate political relations between the Bhosale family and the Brahman priests of the court. Pratapsinh's assertion of his position as a true Chatrapati was not only a symbolic gesture of defiance to the Brahmans, whom he felt had appropriated the power that belonged to the Bhosales, but also had implications for very concrete issues like the employment and dismissal of palace priests; the relationships between different Brahman factions at the court; and ultimately the very mechanisms whereby internal caste discipline was maintained. It was as much with issues like these, as over the symbolism of Pratapsinh's campaign, that Brahmans like Balajipant Natu were concerned. In the interchange recorded here, Pratapsinh's de facto power to appoint and dismiss priests

52. G.S. Sardesai (Ed.) Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara, Government Central Press, Bombay 1934, Vol. 42, p. 87.

53. ibid., pp. 85-86.

was balanced against his extraordinary dependence on the Brahman priest for the most basic explanation of what ritual would be appropriate for the Bhosale family. The Brahman Walimbe clearly regarded ritual as a matter of negotiation, bearing upon his relationship with the Chatrapati and his fellow Brahmans:

> 'The Bhatji said that the matter of Vedic ritual had been decided. Rites from the Yajurveda are those proper to Ksatriyas, and those are the custom in Udepur, and should therefore be in use amongst our caste in Satara. He said that we do rituals from the Rgveda here, but that if we are to do it in Satara as in Udepur, they should send us the texts and we will do them for you. The Bhatji was trying very hard to ingratiate himself with me, and said that he would do whatever had to be done, and perform a penance for it afterwards if he had to. All this is really just a device to get the texts sent, although we can only do these rites if a place for them is fixed. As long as we are all right I will be pleased. The real thing is to get the proper sastric texts.' 54

Pratapsinh made persistent attempts to use British Residents to obtain the religious texts appropriate to Ksatriyas from Udepur, which called forth the following rather exasperated note from the Secretary to the Governor of Bombay to the Resident at Satara:

> 'The Honourable the Governor requests that you will inform His Highness that every effort has been made to obtain the works so anxiously wished for by him, but having hitherto proved ineffectual, he cannot anticipate any good from the frequent repetition of the applications already made on this subject.' 55

54. G.S. Sardesai (Ed.), Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara, Government Central Press, Bombay 1934, Vol.42, pp.87-88.

55. Secretary to the Governor of Bombay to the Resident at Satara, No. 41 of 17 September 1928, Bombay Political Consultations.

It seems obvious that Pratapsinh's initiatives, and the activities of the Ksatriya Maratha Mandal, represented a surge of interest in the social status of elite Maratha families, and a set of claims to Ksatriya status, Vedic ritual, and social intercourse with prominent princely families in other parts of India. These were, if not unprecedented, certainly new in terms of recent Maratha history. Pratapsinh's obvious lack even of the most basic information about his family's descent, and of the rituals proper to its status, suggest the novelty of his claims. The defeat of Bajirao II and the British decision to restore the descendant of Sivaji to the gadi at Satara, with all due honours, almost certainly acted as a stimulus for the revival of Maratha consciousness of their past social and political pre-eminence, and made it possible for families like the Bhosales to advance new claims. But what was most significant about the dispute was the interdependence of claims to ritual status, and Pratapsinh's more deliberately political assertion of what he saw as his restored authority over all Hindus, against the usurpers of that authority and their caste-fellows, the Citpavan Brahmans of Satara and Pune. Pratapsinh clearly felt that there were certain kinds of authority and power within Maharashtrian society that had not been transferred to the East India Company's government. This power was not only the practical ability to control social and political processes, made available to the Maratha party by the creation of the state of Satara. It was also the ability to demonstrate a very broad social leadership, with claims on the loyalty of every group within Maharashtrian society, and to

derive authority for this leadership from interpretations of the specific political relationships within society since the time of Sivaji. Pratapsinh's search for ways of demonstrating this kind of authority was almost certainly made, also, lest East India Company rule might be short-lived, thus opening the way to a fuller revival of the ancient authority of his family. Success in asserting this kind of political authority over other groups depended, in turn, on the manipulation of the religious sanctions by which political authority had been traditionally surrounded and underpinned. The admission of a Ksatriya varna status became an essential adjunct to Pratapsinh's attempt to present himself as the inheritor of Sivaji's mantle, and to re-establish the position of elite Maratha families as the natural leaders of society and the dominant force shaping its history and culture. The control of varna status was also the means by which the Brahman party attempted to deny credibility to Pratapsinh's idea of a society shaped by a warrior-and-landowning elite, and led by a Chatrapati with all the authority that traditional Hinduism conferred upon a King; and to emphasise instead the administrative dependence of the Marathas on their Brahman ministers, and their lack, as Sudras, of any but the authority of de facto power for their rule.

5. The disputes at Satara, and Maratha social structure.

With their central location in Satara, their focus on issues of social status and religious convention, their culmination in the very widely publicised debate of 1830, with the daring of Pratapsinh in assuming control of the appointment of palace priests and his spectactular coronation in the manner of Sivaji in 1837, the events of these

two decades almost certainly made a deep impression at many different levels of local society. The dispute affected not only those directly involved in it, but had implications for the much larger range of social groups at lower levels of the Maratha-kunbi complex, who might eventually advance the same claims. This brings us again to the other major part of the argument in this chapter: the creation in the early nineteenth century, if not before, of a well-defined process of upward mobility within the Maratha-kunbi group of castes. The initiatives of the Satara Marathas almost certainly facilitated this sort of mobility. The social pre-eminence of elite families within local society was, of course, very clear cut, and the boundaries of social intercourse for families such as the Bhosales were laid down distinctly. However, the line between acknowledged assal families, and those with obviously kunbi origins, was much less clearly drawn in matters of ritual practice and religious usage. This emerges very strongly from the points made at the 1830 debate, which seem intended mainly to prove that elite families had not forfeited their right to Ksatriya status despite their widespread adoption of religious and domestic practices that were either an obvious product of Muslim influence, or which belonged in strict religious terms to Sudras. When, as in 1830, the issue was forced over the criteria for Ksatriya status, this flexibility of ritual practice made it necessary to have a series of definitions that would accommodate a very much wider range of groups than would, in practice, have been admitted to social intercourse with elite families. The criteria laid down in 1830 would have prevented almost no respectable kunbi family from putting forward claims to Ksatriya status.

All this seems confirmed when we turn back to Pratapsinh's diaries, where he frequently recorded his anxiety and irritation at the efforts of humble kunbi families to connect themselves with assal families. He made it clear that the 1820's and 1830's had seen a very worrying increase in such threats to their purity. The diaries also point to some of the effects of the British presence upon the structure of caste in this area of western Indian society, and suggest that this may have been to promote the kind of social mobility under discussion, by weakening the authority of the traditional heads of caste, such as Pratapsinh himself.

Pratapsinh recorded with satisfaction the account given by a representative of the Ksatriya Kachhva family of northern India of their valuation of the different Maratha and Rajput families:

> 'Whenever men from our house go anywhere on service, we do not actually put our hands to the ground to salute any but these three: the Raja of Satara, Ranaji of Udepur and the Kachhva Raja. This is even an order in our house. I am in the service of the Gaikwad, but they are only kunbis, so I say "Ram, Ram" when I greet them, and I do not make a proper respectful salutation'.

However, the Kachhva man continued, these distinctions often came under attack:

> 'Even though those people have given us lakhs of rupees, still we will not make marriage connections with them. They have asked us for our daughter in marriage, and the matter has even come to blows. Daulatrao Sinde asked the Kachhva family of Rampur for their daughter, and at this the Kachhvas were angry, and they quarrelled for five years, and Sinde even took some provinces from him, but he would not give him his daughter. 56

56. G.S. Sardesai (Ed). Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara, pp. 85-86.

More recently, the Gaikwad family of Baroda had made determined efforts to associate themselves with elite families which Pratapsinh discussed in a long entry in his diary:

> 'I discussed with the Resident the acts of treachery that the Gaikwad has committed upon the Maratha caste, in leading certain people astray by offering them a reward for contracting marriage alliances. The Gaikwad is a kunbi; he has led the people of our caste into wrong, and polluted the caste. He holds authority in his own caste, and has no reason to force himself into our caste'.

This was no isolated incident, and posed the greatest threat to the proper social hierarchies:

> 'These days, when the kunbis and others grow wealthy, they try to pollute our caste. If this goes on, dharma itself will not remain. Each man should stick to his own caste, but in spite of this these men are trying to spread money around in our caste. But make no mistake, all Ksatriyas will look to protect their caste in this matter'.

The Gaikwad had clearly had some success with his financial inducements, and Pratapsinh related how he had had to throw many individuals out of caste:

> 'The Gaikwad of Baroda, as a mere kunbi, has offered some people of the Maratha caste the inducement of money and led them into betrayal and pollution. So the whole community of the Marathas gathered together and it was found that Chimnappa Sirke Kutrekar was responsible, so I said to him, you are no longer in our caste. Today, you must leave Satara. Thus, he was thrown out of the caste. The son of Appajirao Mohite had also gone over to the Gaikwad; so I told him he also was out of caste'. 57

57. G.S. Sardesai (Ed.) Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara, pp. 65-66.

Pratapsinh followed this with a long list of others punished for the same offence, and explained how he had also stopped their allowances where the offenders were employed by the Satara government.

He also complained of the breakdown of caste authority that had occurred since the introduction of British rule:

> 'Under the rule of Bajirao, there was a quarrel between the Sirkes and the Mahadiks, and we ourselves settled it within our own castes by ourselves. Today, however, the English government refuse to take any part in caste discipline at all. These people have become very wealthy, and so they do this'.

Pratapsinh even urged the British Resident at Satara that 'the government of the Company should prohibit this, both within its own and within this country's boundaries, and this would be to the credit of the Company'[58], and sent the Resident a long memorandum about the proper rules of social intercourse between the different families. This refusal of the British government to take the same active role in the maintenance of caste discipline that had been assumed by the government of the peshwas may also have stimulated this kind of social mobility. Hiroshi Fukazawa has described how

> 'so far as the eighteenth century Maratha kingdom was concerned, the state played a vital role in the caste matters of the subjects, from the forfeiture and restoration of the caste status of individuals to the division of caste, the formulation of caste codes and the stabilisation of caste distinctions'. 59

58. G.S. Sardesai (Ed.) Selections from the Peshwa Daftar: Papers Referring to Pratapsinh, Raja of Satara, pp. 66.

59. Hiroshi Fukazawa, 'State and caste System (jati) in the eighteenth century Maratha Kingdom' in Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics, Vol.9, No.1. June 1968, p. 43.

For the period immediately after the assumption of rule by the East India Company, N.K. Wagle has described how the Bombay government literally abdicated all responsibility for enforcing the decisions of religious leaders concerning caste and ritual proprieties, a responsibility that the peshwa's government had taken very seriously.[60] Wagle shows how this abdication was accompanied by claims to a higher ritual status by sub-castes amongst the Sonars and Prabhus - the opposition to which, incidentally, was also lead by the same Çitpavan party that had denied Pratapsinh's claims. With the example of Pratapsinh, this relaxation of caste discipline almost certainly extended to the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes. This was certainly the impression of one observer, Tukaram Tatya Padaval, writing in 1861.[61] He described the growth of claims to a Ksatriya status that had become commonplace among a very wide range of social groups:

> 'If you ask about the Ksatriya caste, then you will find Rajputs say, we are Ksatriya; Marathas say, we are Ksatriya; Prabhus say, we are Ksatriya; Pancakulase and Vadavala Sutars say, we are Ksatriya of the Soma line; and Khatris say, we are Ksatriya'. 62

60. N.K. Wagle, op. cit., pp. 135-141.

61. Tukaram Tatya Padaval (1838-1898) was a Bhandari by caste. His book, A Critique of Caste Divisions, was first published in 1861, and argued that all caste divisions were artificial, since the original purity of castes had long since been lost. Padaval became a friend of Phule's, whose name appears as the publisher of the second edition of his book in 1865. This connection with Phule does not entirely disqualify Padaval as an independent observer of these attempts at upward social mobility, since there is no clear reason why he should have had a special interest in arguing that these processes existed. For this reason, and because direct observations on this area of social structure are so difficult to find for the mid-century, I have included his remarks.

62. Tukaram Tatya Padaval, A Critique of Caste Divisions, Bombay 1861, (Marathi), p. 34.

A similar movement could be seen even at the lower levels of the Maratha-kunbi caste complex:

> 'These days, people just put on any old thread to make themselves look of a higher caste, and even the kunbi people now put on a great big thick sacred thread of cotton like the Brahmans that reaches right down to their knees, and parade about calling themselves Maratha Ksatriyas'. 63.

6. Conclusion.

This chapter has brought out three important aspects of the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes that were to be echoed strongly in later non-Brahman ideology and in Phule's own thought. The first was that of a movement of upward mobility, which had as its object the emulation of a regional identity, whose attributes were those of martial heroism and an identification with the land. The second was the use of an assertion to Ksatriya status as an adjunct to claims directly concerning the political relationships between groups within western Indian society. The third concerns the term 'Maratha' itself. At the beginning of the century, the term was applied in a loose and politically neutral way, either to denote all those Marathi-speakers who had fought together under Sivaji and his successors or to signify the elite Maratha families themselves. This was to change radically towards the end of the century. By the 1870's it is possible to see how the older tradition of debate, about which groups might claim to inherit the traditions and authority of Sivaji, had begun to be transformed into a much wider controversy about the very nature of Maharashtra's traditions and culture.

63. Tukaram Tatya Padaval, A Critique of Caste Divisions, p. 35.

Chapter Four.

The crisis of cultural legitimacy: Missionaries, reformers and Hindu society in the mid-nineteenth century.

1. Introduction.

The most striking and consistent feature of public debate over social and religious issues in mid-nineteenth century western India, that found expression in the new periodical press created in the 1830's and 1840's, lay in its acute sense of the failures of Hindu society. In these debates, the attention of the educated and literate was focussed upon the inadequacy of traditional social forms to meet the economic, technological and ideological challenges created under British rule, upon the failure of Hindu society to provide a durable basis for an ordered political life, on its incomplete or inaccurate understanding of the material world, and on the positively destructive effects of some of its most tenaciously observed religious beliefs and practices upon a very wide variety of social groups. This sense of the defectiveness of the structures and beliefs of Hindu society was accompanied by an intense search for modifications or substitutes. In the process, the debate questioned the very grounds on which Hindu society and religion were constituted, and the legitimacy of their claims to respect and obedience from Hindus themselves.

This sense of social inadequacy amongst Hindus themselves was

not limited to those on the fringes of conventional Hindu society - to groups seeking very radical social reforms, or to potential converts to Christianity. Rather, these ideas took root at the very centre of Indian political and social opinion, to become a virtual consensus amongst some of western India's wealthiest, most prominent and politically powerful groups. They formed the currency of everyday argument and the focus of intelligent concern amongst almost all groups with any contact with the administrative and educational structures of British rule.

This virtual revolution in social and cultural values formed the essential ideological background to the development of Phule's ideas in the late 1840's and early 1850's. The arguments of protestant missionaries, European radicals and freethinkers, and of Indian reformers provided him with material and techniques for the construction of his own critique of orthodox society and religion. However, these more specific connections in Phule's thought, and the experiences that led to them, can only be understood against the background of this broader crisis in values, with its catastrophic effect on the structures of social control within Hindu society, and on the public credibility and claims to legitimacy of its most important institutions.

The question that suggests itself immediately on any reading of the social reform literature of the period concerns precisely this process of cultural breakdown. The question of the influence of Christian or other western ideas upon social reform movements has always been one of the normal subjects of scholarly concern for historians of nineteenth century India. Yet relatively little

attention has been paid to the causes of this crisis in social and political values.[1] It is assumed, quite rightly, that it has external origins, most obviously in the attempts of missionaries to discredit Hindu religious beliefs, and in the processes of education and secularisation more generally associated with British rule. No study, of western India at least, has explained exactly why traditional systems of thought about the nature of God, the proper administration of society or the workings of the natural world seemed to succumb so easily to quite alien systems of thought and value, at least among those with any degree of contact with the administrative and educational institutions of British rule. No doubt, Christian missionaries in all three presidencies were extremely active in their efforts at proselytisation, and they conceived it as one of their main functions to undermine the public credibility of Hindu religious belief and social practice, using whatever means came to hand: antiquarian researches to show the

1. See, for example, G.A. Oddie, Social Protest in India: British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reform, 1850-1900, Manohar, Delhi 1979, pp. 69-74. Oddie attempts to assess the influence of missionary propaganda on Hindu social reform movements, but goes no further than to say that missionary ideas must have encouraged such movements. See also Duncan B. Forrester, Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India, Curzon Press, London 1980, especially the chapter 'Hindu responses to the missionary attack on caste'. Forrester here describes the different Hindu responses to missionary and more broadly western and liberal ideas, from Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj to Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, but does not address the underlying question of why, in the first place, Christian propaganda should have been felt to be so subversive of conventional Hindu beliefs.

discrepancies between ancient and modern Hindu beliefs, 'common-sense' objections to apparent contradictions in social practices and humanitarian expressions of horror at the social consequences of some traditional values. However, the mere expression of disapproval by protestant missionaries or Christian propaganda about the sin of idolatry, the urgent need for repentance or the wrath of Christ at the day of judgement is by no means sufficient to account for the very widely shared sense that Hindu society was in some way morally corrupt and debilitated and politically and economically a failure. Contrary to missionary expectations, in very few cases did radicals and reformers espouse overtly Christian beliefs. They accepted and adopted as their own the most violent condemnations of Hindu social institutions, but without identifying themselves with any specific Christian religious doctrines. Rather, Hindu social reformers of almost all shades of opinion accepted a religious worldview which emphasised the desacrilisation of the natural world, in the idea of a unique Creator removed from his creation, a Creator who represented the ultimate standard of goodness and justice for the guidance of man's moral and spiritual life. This idea was then applied to human social affairs, to assert the basic equality of all men before the Creator, the contingency of all human hierarchies, and the greater value of individual effort and merit in human society over status ascribed by birth or office.

Two quite distinct sets of ideas contributed to this shift in religious and social values, as its external causes. The first was transmitted in the highly public propaganda of Christian missionaries and evangelicals. The second consisted of religious

and social ideas taken from the Enlightenment in eighteenth century Europe, which were still very much a matter for debate in radical circles in early nineteenth century England: deist ideas in religion, in the rejection of traditional religious hierarchies and the re-examination of the claims of revealed religion, and a concern with the natural and political rights of the individual in society. These two sets of ideas, apparently so deeply divergent, worked in practice in the same direction to reinforce one another in mid-nineteenth century western India. Together, they helped produce the breakdown of belief in traditional institutions amongst the western-educated, and its replacement with the convictions described above.

This was not quite the paradox that it at first seems. Firstly, in their attacks on the superstition and idolatry of Hindu religion, on its belief in magic, on its trust in religious texts whose contents seemed improbable and contradictory, and on its faith in a priesthood that seemed to have lost sight of its spiritual mission, protestant missionaries used arguments that bore a strong structural resemblance to those employed by European religious radicals against the corruptions of the European Catholic church. Certainly in the case of the protestant missionaries active in western India, who had been strongly influenced by the evangelical revival at the end of the eighteenth century, this was not a process of direct borrowing. In common with most establishment protestants, missionaries in western India abhorred the beliefs and remonstrated against the influence of the European 'atheists', such as Voltaire, Count Volney and Thomas

Paine,[2] whose works were popular amongst western-educated Hindus.

The similarity of their arguments arose, rather, from the strategies that were adopted by the missionaries as the most effective means of undermining Hindu religious beliefs. These strategies were very similar because missionaries and European radicals perceived similar features in the respective objects of their reforming zeal. Both set themselves in opposition to a priesthood that had wrongly interposed itself between the believer and his God. Both attacked a conception of the divine that blurred and obfuscated both the uniqueness of the Creator, and his essential separation both from the natural world, and from all the constructs of human society, and both condemned the elaborate rituals to which this confusion had given rise. Both questioned a faith in religious texts that failed to stand the test of human reason. Finally, both claimed that these religious systems, with their endowment of human authorities and hierarchies with divine sanction, had produced a stagnation in human society that denied proper human freedoms, stifled individual merit and talent, and impeded the workings of man's reason and the progress of human knowledge.

2. C.F. Volney (1757-1820) was a French political and religious radical, often thought to have influenced Thomas Paine. Volney's most famous work, The Ruins: or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires, published in 1791, was an astonishingly radical attack on revealed religion and on the legitimacy of secular authority that claimed to be founded on revealed religion. For a general account of European religious radicalism towards the end of the eighteenth century, see N. Hampson. The Enlightenment, Penguin 1968, and R.J. White, The Anti-Philosophers: A Study of the Philosophes in Eighteenth Century France. Macmillan, London 1970.

Missionaries felt that the best means of proselytisation lay not in an emphasis on the specific doctrines of Christianity as a revealed religion, but upon the normative and cognitive framework in which they were located. This distinction between specific doctrine and ideological framework is crucial for our understanding of the structure and effectiveness of missionary polemic. In missionary propaganda, overtly Christian doctrines about the human soul and original sin, the importance of individual faith and good works in life and the fate of the soul after death, the redemption of sin in the death of Christ and the fulfilment of God's plan on the day of judgement, were situated ideologically within a broader and internally coherent framework of belief about the nature of God and his attitude to his human creatures, the relations between society and the individual, the role of Christian nations in the world, and the workings of the material universe. Some of these latter beliefs belonged typically to the social and scientific worldview of early nineteenth century educated British society; others represented a more enduring part of the Christian account of the relations between God and the world.

In this broader framework of belief, God appeared as the unique source of all creation, and, in his absolute purity, as the definitive opposite of sin and evil. Although he might act in the world as Providence, he remained essentially separate from all merely human social constructs, exercising only the moral government which formed the ultimate criterion for their legitimacy. This moral government placed the subjective values of individual merit and virtue above the ascriptive values of status conferred

by human, social or religious hierarchies. God had no inherent existence in the natural world and the material universe. In their miraculous harmony and regularity, they stood divested of all magical or sacred significance, available for investigation and understanding by man's practical reason, standing before him as the testimony to the ultimate power of the Creator and to the unity of religious and scientific truth. In England, certainly before the mid-century, most scientific attempts to understand different aspects of the workings of the natural world were dominated by the notion that all such investigations could only confirm existing ideas of the beauty and harmony of the universe, that testified to the glory of its Creator. These were certainly the assumptions that underlay one of the most ambitious attampts of the early part of the century to collect and extend scientific knowledge, the Bridgewater Treatises.[3] The mid-nineteenth century trust in absolute social progress also characterised this framework of belief, and projected a view of the development of the world's history which compared the social, scientific and material conditions of western Christian nations with the Hindu and Muslim societies of India, and pronounced their superior

3. For a short account of the developing relationship between religious and scientific ideas in nineteenth century England, see Owen Chadwick, 'Religion and Science in Victorian England: Legend and Reality'. Australian and New Zealand Theological Review: Supplement to Colloquium: Selwyn Lectures 1967.

social progress to be the result of belief in Christian truths.[4]

This ideological framework possessed no structurally essential connections with specifically Christian doctrines. It formed in itself a general account of the nature of God and the world, which could be used quite independently of professedly Christian beliefs. This more general framework of values and beliefs possessed a degree of forcible conviction that would always have been lacking in the advocacy of avowedly Christian doctrines. This conviction derived from its connection with apparently secular and quite objective truths of overwhelming importance for the future welfare and prosperity of Indian society. For Hindu reformers, the acceptance of these truths pointed also to an acceptance of the ideological framework from which they seemed to emerge, and to a wholesale withdrawal of belief from the Hindu practices and institutions whose validity these truths called into question.

First, there were the glaringly obvious discrepancies between the social and material successes of Indian and western societies - or at least in the aspects of western societies that were presented to Indians themselves.[5] There was the emergent capacity of western

4. This was one of the main arguments of Murray Mitchell's Letters to Indian Youth on the Evidences of the Christian Religion, with a Brief Examination of the Evidences of Hinduism and Muhamadanism, Madras 1861, pp. 84-89. The book was enormously popular: it went through seven editions between 1861 and 1894.

5. These were, of course, by no means the same thing. What is remarkable is the success with which both missionaries and the larger East India Company establishment in India managed, in their public exchanges with Indian reformers, to divert attention away from the areas of English society that plainly gave the lie to the image of prosperity and equality, so that this rarely featured as an element in the arguments of the defenders of Hindu society.

societies to understand and manipulate the material world. The advances of nineteenth century science were presented as at one with the truths of Christian religion, and its discoveries about the construction of the natural world and the material universe appeared as an irrefutable testimony to the inadequacy or hopeless inaccuracy of Hindu accounts, from the realms of traditional science in geography and astrology, to their projection of a natural world invested with divine forces. The political sphere seemed also to present quite objective truths about the inadequacy of Indian society, in its failure even to maintain itself against external enemies, let alone to provide a stable internal order. Finally, the advance of human progress presented in nineteenth century historical accounts seemed to require a fundamental shift in the traditional Hindu view of India's position among other societies. In place of its traditional projection as the land of punya, the blessed home of human happiness and virtue and the receptacle of religious truth, nineteenth century historical writing consigned India to the ranks of the losers in the advance of human societies to the highest state of civilisation, an object for the compassion and charitable help of more successful societies.[6]

6. The most notable example of this view is, of course, James Mill's History of British India, first published in 1817, and later edited and continued by the scholar H.H.Wilson. Wilson's annotation of Mill's original work refers frequently to his characterisation of Hindu society as primitive and backward. In the Preface to the fourth edition of 1840, Wilson laments the damage done to relations between East India Company servants and Hindus, owing to the 'unrelenting pertinacity with which he labours to establish the barbarism of the Hindus', an opinion which Company servants had 'imbibed in early life from the History of Mr. Mill'.

The partial and distorted nature of this account, its roots in a specifically Christian and intensely Eurocentric worldview, lay obscured by its links with apparently secular and quite objective facts, from accounts of the workings of nature to the differential progress of human societies. These links were forged and reinforced in missionary propaganda itself, as missionaries sought to lead Hindus to an acceptance of Christian beliefs through the admission of these secular truths and of the framework of beliefs with which they seemed to go hand in hand. The apparent connections of Christian doctrine with objective truths about the world constituted the great polemical strength of missionary propaganda, and one which was used indiscriminately in the mid-century debates. The acceptance by a wide range of Hindu reformers and radicals both of their secular accuracy and their great potential for human benefit coalesced with the objective fact of Indian defeat to produce an account of Indian society which saw only a series of depressing shortcomings: the corruption of old ideals, the stagnation of knowledge, the petrification of social classes, the stifling of merit and the triumph of a self-seeking priesthood. Defeat was less a matter for resistance, and more a just retribution and a providential chance to build anew under a more enlightened leadership. Finally, the search for the means of this reconstruction took radicals and reformers back to the ideological framework within which early nineteenth

century Christianity was presented, and of which these apparently secular truths formed an integral, if heavily disguised part: to the belief in a unitary Creator as the ultimate source of moral government for human societies, and in a natural world divested of sacred significance; to the rejection of the ascriptive values of Hindu social hierarchies and the affirmation that individual human merit should form the only valid basis for human social and religious hierarchies, and to the search for present social welfare rather than strict adherence to traditional religious observances.

In this way, the missionary agency of protestant Christianity in western India meant that in much of its proselytisation it emphasised the ideological framework of Christian belief, and the secular truths with which it seemed inseparably connected, as much as the particular doctrines of the Christian faith. Protestant missionaries were also to use the fruits of European radical religion, although this was in quite a different way, and at one remove. The Enlightenment tradition of the rational criticism of the claims of revealed religions had found some of its most extreme representatives in writers like C.F. Volney and Thomas Paine. This tradition also set the precedent for a much less controversial variety of scholarly criticism that was to develop from the end of the eighteenth century, and to apply itself to the study of Oriental religious institutions, beliefs and texts. From the early work of Orientalists such as Alexander Dow, Nathaniel Halhed and Sir William Jones at the College of Fort William in Calcutta, there grew the tradition of the learned criticism of different aspects of Hindu religion and society,

and the reflection of their development in Hindu religious texts.[7] Although the Orientalist sympathy for and interest in Indian religions was soon to be overwhelmed by the less compromising and more overtly anti-Hindu attitudes of the 1820's and 1830's, the same tradition was continued in the work of scholars like H.H.Wilson and Max Muller in England and Professor C. Lassen in Germany.[8] Their scholarly productions were in their turn rewritten into popular accounts suitable for the serious layman, such as Dr. John Muir's Original Sanskrit Texts, on the Origin and Progress of the Religion and Institutions of India, collected, translated into English and illustrated by notes. These were published in four volumes between

7. For an account of the growth of Orientalist scholarship from the late eighteenth century, see P.J. Marshall, The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 1-44.

8. A general account of this shift in attitudes is in D. Kopf, British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: the Dynamics of Indian Modernisation 1773-1835. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969, pp. 167-177. Details of the work of Max Muller and other European Sanskrit scholars are in N.C. Chaudhuri, Scholar Extraordinary: the Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Muller, P.C. Chatto and Windus, London 1974, pp. 123-146.

1858 and 1863, and reprinted in five volumes from 1869.[9]

Both popularising authors and professional scholars might be more or less objective in their accounts of ancient and modern Hindu society and religion. Yet it was not from any transmitted bias that missionaries were able to draw material for their attack on Hinduism as a revealed religion, so much as from the simple provision of information about the dating, authorship, internal consistency and material contents of its sacred texts, and their relationship with ancient and modern social institutions. The transmission of such information to Hindus themselves was naturally seen by the missionaries as a powerful means of undermining belief in the most ancient Hindu texts as the eternal word of God, in Hindu religious beliefs more generally as a stable and consistent body of ideas, and in the possession by Hindu social institutions of any legitimate religious basis. The strength of missionary polemic thus derived from its apparent ability to employ scholarly materials of impeccable objectivity in support of its denial of the divine origins of Hindu religion. This strength was only intensified when, as in the case of John Muir, the popularisers of scholarly research themselves revealed a strong Christian bias. Muir, the author of several Christian tracts as well as the Original Sanskrit Texts, intended the latter 'to assist the researches of those Hindus who may desire to investigate critically the most important points in the civil and

9. John Muir acknowledged his debts to H.H. Wilson and Max Muller and Professor C. Lassen for information on the Vedas, to the French scholar M. Langlois for his account of the Harivamsa, and to M. Burnouf for his translation of the Bhagavat purana. John Muir, Original Sanskrit Texts, Vol. 1, pp.iii-iv.

religious history of their nation'.[10] The first volume examined the mythical accounts of the origins of castes given in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the writings of Manu, the Bhagavat, Visnu and Vayu puranas, the Harivamsa and the Mahabharat, commenting on the inconsistencies of different authors. The second volume advanced the theory that central Asia had been the cradle of a common Aryan civilisation, in which the Indian, Persian, Greek and Roman peoples had shared a common culture. It described the Aryan invasions of the subcontinent and the relations of the Aryans with the indigenous inhabitants, events which were echoed in the hymns of the Rgveda:

> 'the ancient bards designated the men of their own tribes by the name of Aryas, and distinguished them expressly from another class of people called Dasyus, who, we have every reason to suppose, were a race of distinct origin from the Aryas, and different from them in colour, in language, in religion and in customs, who had been in occupation of India before it was entered by the Indo-Aryans from the northwest'. [11]

The third volume described the origin and authorship of the Vedas, describing how, as in the case of Greek heroic poetry, they came to be attributed a divine origin:

> 'The indistinct, and perhaps hesitating belief which some of the ancient rsis seem to have entertained in their own inspiration was not suffered to die out in the minds of later generations. On the contrary, this belief grew up by degrees into a fixed persuasion that all the literary productions of those early sages had not only resulted from a supernal impulse, but were infallible, divine and even eternal. These works have become the sacred scriptures of India'. 12.

10. John Muir, Original Sanskrit Texts, Vol. 3,p. v.

11. ibid., Vol. 2, p. 373.

12. ibid., Vol. 3, p. 171

The last volume compared the descriptions of the deities Brahma, Visnu and Rudra given in the Vedic hymns with those in the puranas, showing how the earlier conceptions had been gradually modified in the later works.

The effects of accounts and translations such as these upon Hindu reformers, both in directly furnishing apparently objective information about the origins of contemporary Hindu society, and in providing missionary polemicists with material for their arguments, was greatly reinforced by the direct influence of deist and religious radical thought from Europe. The presence of this influence, both in the form of popular literature, and of atheist, deist or free-thinking Europeans, often teachers in government schools, was of crucial importance for the decline of belief in traditional institutions and practices, and for the growth of radical and reformist opinion. Firstly, one of the most important arguments of eighteenth century deists and religious radicals, and the inheritors of this tradition amongst the free-thinkers and political radicals of early nineteenth century England, was their denial that any of the world's religious confessions contained a direct divine revelation. Radical writers and polemicists supported this argument with a detailed examination of the Old and New Testament, denying the consistency of large parts of them either with human reason, or with the absolute purity and universality of the Creator as they envisaged him. By the powers of his critical reason, man could know all the true propositions of theology that it was necessary for him to know, and from these observations could arrive at a knowledge of his spiritual duty to worship his Creator, and his moral duty to refrain from harming his

neighbour. In this way, European religious radicals provided arguments that Hindu reformers and radicals could use against Christian doctrines, arguments that had exactly the same structure as those that missionaries used against Hindu beliefs. This meant that the alternative to traditional belief for Hindu reformers influenced in this way was not simply to be a conversion to Christianity, since it suffered from exactly the same inconsistencies as Hinduism. Much more convincing was the view of an impersonal and universal Creator, and of religious and moral duties for man entirely consistent with human reason, that were put forward in the work of European deists and radicals. It was exactly at this point that the emphasis of missionary protestantism upon the ideological framework of belief coincided with the religious worldview of eighteenth century deism.[13]

13. I take my definition of deism here from P.P. Wiener, A Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1968-1973, Vol. 1, pp. 646-647. Central to this definition is the idea that by rational methods alone men can know all the true propositions of theology that it is necessary or desirable for them to know. The other interpretation of this coincidence of ideas would be that the missionary polemicists were themselves influenced by deist ideas. The only form in which the protestant missionaries active in western India were influenced in this way lay in their acceptance of the much more conventional arguments of eighteenth century natural theology, such as the work of William Paley. Paley argued not that man's perceptions of the physical universe could be a substitute for revealed religion, after the manner of the European religious radicals, but that all physical creation bore witness to the majesty of the Creator. Missionaries in western India certainly accepted these arguments, and in their proselytising constantly stressed the wonders of creation as the evidence of the existence of a supreme Creator.

Both laid emphasis on the uniqueness of the Creator and his separateness from his creation. Each stressed, in the face of human error and superstition, the power of man's reason in leading him towards both religious and scientific truth. Both called for the abolition of human authorities and hierarchies that seemed to impede the free play of man's reason and the progress of his understanding of the material world. In identifying themselves with this set of beliefs, moreover, Hindu reformers did not deprive themselves of the connection with the secular truths of human progress that were so strenuously pressed by the missionaries. On the contrary, the assaults of European radicals on the inconsistency, superstition and downright immorality to be found in the Bible, made it seem to Hindu reformers that the advance of secular knowledge and material progress would be much more likely the product of the belief in a more universal Creator and in a more substantial role for human reason.

In the case of Hindu reformers and radicals, the missionary effort was in this way sabotaged by its own parallelism with the tradition of European religious radicalism, and by the direct influence of that tradition in western India. From this play of influences there emerged from the mid-nineteenth century the spectrum of reform opinion with which we are familiar: from the deist convictions of the Paramahansa Mandali, to the outright radicalism and anti-clericalism of Phule himself.

2. <u>The framework of the mid-century debates</u>.

A crucial feature of these mid-century debates lay in the intense publicity that surrounded them. The new English and vernacular periodical literature and the large-scale production of cheap

religious tracts and books intended to provoke critical discussion created an arena for debate that was open to anyone who could read, and to a much wider and non-literate audience through oral means, in gossip, rumour, local discussion groups and impromptu meetings.[14] The existence of such an arena was a phenomenon quite new in western India. Indian religious life had, of course, its own traditions of debate. But traditional religious debate had always addressed itself to the limited audience of a particular sampradaya or individual religious sect. What distinguished the debates of the nineteenth century was precisely the drive to transcend the isolated social group, and appeal to the community at large. This was not merely a shift in audience, but a much more fundamental change in the social significance and implications of the debate itself. In these debates, writers invoked the 'public interest', which represented a 'universal' good, in their opposition to traditional beliefs. Implicit in this was the contrast between the partial and selfish concerns of particular social groups and individuals, and the 'universal' good of the community as a whole. To this idea of the 'public' interest attached an overwhelming social imperative: it transcended all particular interests and formed the final criterion for assessing social,

14. The question of the propagation of new religious ideas beyond the small groups of the educated and literate and through oral means, is beyond the immediate scope of this thesis. However, the study of the importance of oral means of communicating new ideas in pre-literate societies is a rapidly expanding area of scholarship, with clear implications for this area of South Asian studies. A very good treatment of these issues, with much that can be applied to western Indian society in the mid-nineteenth century, is R.W. Scribner, For the sake of simple folk: Popular Propaganda in the German Reformation, Cambridge University Press 1981.

religious and political activity at all levels of society.[15]

This had important implications for the development of reformist and radical thought in the mid-century, and for the crisis in traditional values that accompanied it. The idea of the good of the community as the paramount social value was set up against the traditional means of conferring legitimacy upon social and religious institutions. In place of the appeal to prescription, to the social regulations outlined in religious writings, or to the special religious privileges of high caste groups, radicals and reformers could assert the social imperative of the present welfare of the community. The effectiveness of such an assertion lay in the creation of a compelling new set of values for the legitimation of social and religious forms that rivalled and threatened to displace the traditional sources of social and religious authority. Such appeals to the present good of the community as a whole came to form one of the most important instruments of reformist polemic. In particular, it came to be associated with the appeals to social utility of high caste and gradualist reformers, who based their arguments upon the sheer wastage of India's human and material resources caused by traditional practices.

15. The origins of this new ideological framework for the administration of 'public' concerns forms a fascinating subject for research. It seems likely that it can be traced to a similar development in early nineteenth century British politics, and to the emergence of a similar vocabulary of 'public concern' amongst radical groups in the debates over political reform in the 1820's and 1830's. For an account of political radicalism in early nineteenth century England, see R.J. White, Waterloo to Peterloo, Penguin, 1968, pp. 65-86.

The debates also reflected a changing conception of the role of the individual Hindu. The idea of the 'public interest' as a paramount social value has by definition the notion of distributive social justice as its basis, set up in opposition to the dominance of particular interests in the administration of social affairs. Every socially concerned individual could claim an interest in its protection, and in the determination of social questions. In the debates of the mid-century, designed to be available to as broad a range of social groups as possible, and taking as their subject literally the core beliefs and practices of Hindu religion, it was suggested that the structure of Hindu society itself was open to discussion, criticism, and ultimately to determination by every concerned and informed Hindu. In this way, the creation of a public arena for debate presented radicals and reformers not only with the physical means for the expression and propagation of their views, but with the conviction that the determination of these major public issues belonged ultimately to concerned individuals like themselves. This was evident in the increase and popularity of the original correspondence received and published by all the major vernacular periodicals, and in the growing popular willingness they revealed to discuss and criticise social and religious issues of every description.

3. Missionary polemic in the debates: The background.

The missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland, with the American mission, took the lead in the proselytisation of western India. The Church of Scotland missionaries were very much a product

of the movement in England away from the sympathetic understanding and tolerance of Hinduism that had distinguished the approach of the early Orientalists in Bengal, towards the evangelical and Eurocentric attitudes of Lord Bentinck's administration. The work of Alexander Duff in Bengal excercised a formative influence on missionary efforts in this period. Duff's strategy consisted in a direct assault on the central stronghold of Hindu society, through the conversion of its leaders. This was to be achieved through a massive educational effort, in which instruction in western arts and sciences was accompanied by a teaching of the Christian scriptures. Duff argued that religious truth, social progress and the advance of scientific understanding were inseparably connected with each other. All truth derived ultimately from the same Christian source. Western learning in India would naturally create the desire for the Christian truth on which it was built.[16]

Both Scottish and American missionary activities were informed by a passionate conviction of the absolute moral evil of Hinduism, its offensiveness in the sight of God, and the duty of every Christian to drive back the demons of idolatry and superstition with the sword

16. Alexander Duff's work is treated at length in J.M. Orr, The Contribution of Scottish Missions to the Rise of Responsible Churches in India, University of Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis, 1867, pp. 73-101, and M. Laird, Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1836, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972, pp.201-236. On the part of Scottish missionaries like Duff, this zeal was in part the product of the evangelical revival in Scotland itself, which took place under the guidance of Methodist leaders such as George Whitby and John Wesley. This had issued in the 1790's in a great surge of enthusiasm for missionary work, and the founding of the Glasgow Missionary Society and the Scottish Missionary Scoeity in Edinburgh. See J.M. Orr, op. cit., pp. 63-69.

of Christian truth. Like Duff, they believed that the most direct way to undermine belief in Hindu institutions lay in the proselytisation of its leaders. In addition to popular evangelism at the wayside pulpit, therefore, they set as one of their most important tasks the assault upon Hinduism at the intellectual level, the challenge of its religious authorities to debate in the public arena of the new pamphlet and periodical press. In addition to the preaching of specific Christian doctrines, they emphasised the ideological framework within which they were situated, not merely as an extension of a particular religious confession, but as the only account of the nature of God, his relations with society and the individual, and the nature of his creation in the material world, that could possibly be accepted by the educated and the intelligent in the era of social and religious progress that had dawned with the new century.

These principles were evident in the work of individual missionaries. The most prominent of the Scottish missionaries were John Wilson; James and Murray Mitchell, who divided their time between Bombay and Pune; Stephen Hislop, who worked in Nagpur; and Robert Nesbit, who worked in Nasik and Ahmadnagar.[17] From the arrival of the first missionary, Donald Mitchell, in 1823, the Scottish missionaries

17. For further details of the lives of these missionaries, see G. Smith, Life of John Wilson, Edinburgh 1878; Murray Mitchell, A Memoir of the Reverend Robert Nesbit, London 1858, Murray Mitchell, In Western India: Recollections of my Early Missionary Life, Edinburgh 1899; G. Smith, The Life of Stephen Hislop, Missionary and Naturalist in Central India, 1844-1863, London 1888; and The Jubilee of Dr. Murray Mitchell, Edinburgh 1899.

had concentrated on education, founding small vernacular schools, and on direct evangelism.[18] The arrival of John Wilson in Bombay in 1828 signalled a new stage in the direct intellectual attack on Hindu beliefs. Wilson set himself to expose and refute Hindu doctrines in full public debate, either in the press or in public disputations later printed in pamphlet form. The first of these took place when Ramchandra, a Brahman convert, visited Bombay in 1830, to declare and defend his new faith. Pandit Lakshmansastri declared after much hesitation that he would defend the teaching of Hinduism on the ten incarnations of Vishnu, and Ramchandra demanded that this should be done in a public place. The debate, lasting three days, began at John Wilson's house on 21 May 1830. It was not confined to the crowds that heard it; two editions of the debate were published in Marathi and quickly sold, and the debate aroused a great deal of interest throughout the city.[19] In February 1831, another champion of Hinduism offered himself. For six successive evenings, Morobhat Dandekar and John Wilson debated in public. Dandekar then published The Verification of the Hindoo Religion,[20] to which

18. Details of the Scottish missionaries' educational efforts are contained in Elizabeth G.K. Hewat, Christ and Western India, Bombay 1950, pp. 49-54, and by the same author, Vision and Achievement: A History of the Foreign Missions of the Churches united in the Church of Scotland, 1796-1865 London 1960, pp.43-54, and in R. Hunter, A History of the Missions of the Free Church of Scotland in India and Africa, London 1873, pp. 212-221.

19. G. Smith, Life of John Wilson, pp. 62-63.

20. Morobhat Dandekar, The verification of the Hindoo Religion, Bombay 1831. A copy of this work is in the British Library.

Wilson replied in his first Exposure of the Hindoo Religion.[21] Narayanrao, the English teacher in the Raja of Satara's school, replied to this in another pamphlet, edited by Dandekar,[22] which Wilson countered in 1834, with A second exposure of the Hindoo religion.[23] There was considerable demand in Bombay for all these texts, and they were promptly translated into Marathi and Bengali.[24] Others of the Scottish missionaries were active in the same way. Nesbit prepared a critique of the Bhagavad Gita, and Stevenson a translation of the Rgveda. They also made the study of the vernaculars and Sanskrit an important priority, the better to understand and refute Hindu religious writings.[25]

21. John Wilson, An exposure of the Hindoo Religion, in Reply to Moro Bhatta Dandekar, Bombay 1832.

22. Narayanrao, A Reply to the Rev. Mr. Wilson's Exposure of Hinduism, Bombay 1834.

23. John Wilson, A second Exposure of the Hindoo Religion, Bombay 1834.

24. G. Smith, Life of John Wilson, pp. 67-68. Murray Mitchell records that 100 copies of Wilson's first tract were sold almost at once, at the very high price of half a rupee. Murray Mitchell, Memoir of the Reverend Robert Nesbit, p. 121.

25. Besides this assault on educated religious opinion in Bombay, the Scottish missionaries continued both their educational efforts and their practice of direct popular evangelism. All undertook extensive tours, from Rajputana to Goa. They paid particular attention to the centres of pilgrimage in western India: Jejuri, Alandi, Pandharpur, in order to initiate personal discussions and to question individual pilgrims about the real benefits that they derived from the worship of idols, and to distribute tracts illustrating their arguments.

An area in which all missionary groups in western India were concerned was the growth of the press. The circulation of tracts formed a great part of their evangelistic agency. The Bombay Tract and Book Society had been founded in 1827, and was reorganised in 1848 under the joint presidency of Murray Mitchell and Hume, the editor of the Dnyanodaya, which had begun publication in Bombay in 1842. Murray Mitchell wanted the Bombay Society to devote itself to the publication of cheap and attractive texts illustrating simple Christian truths. In particular, he was concerned at the extent to which Hindu writers had taken to using the press to print cheap illustrated editions of Hindu texts, and felt that the missionaries were in danger of being left behind in the battle for public attention. Murray Mitchell's drive for greater output was extremely effective. In 1855, the Dnyanodaya was able to report, a total of 54,207 Christian books and tracts of different kinds had been sold that year.[26]

The most important Marathi missionary periodical in western India was the Dnyanodaya, printed from Bombay by the American Marathi Mission. The Dnyanodaya expressed perfectly the worldview of early nineteenth century Christianity described above, and to this extent the strategies of the American missionaries bore a strong resemblance to those of the Europeans.[27] Apart from essays inculcating overtly

26. Dnyanodaya, 15 March 1855.

27. For details of the attitudes and activities of the American missionaries, see William Hazen, A Century in India: a Historical Sketch of the Marathi Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 1813-1913, Bombay 1913; and R. Modak, A short history of the American Marathi Mission, Pune 1883, (Marathi).

Christian beliefs, it contained articles on the ancient and modern history of the world, on world geography, on aspects of natural history unfamiliar or misunderstood by ordinary Indians, on recent advances in astronomy, on the progress of medical science in the west and its ability to encompass human life in every country of the world in its understanding of the workings of the human body, and on the developing capacity of western science to understand and manipulate the material world for the benefit of mankind. All of these were in turn used to demonstrate the truth of Christian ideas: of a beneficicent deity who had made man to occupy a special moral and intellectual position in the world, who had created the material world for his support and enjoyment through the use of his reason, a deity who had clearly created all men the same in their physical lives, and who exercised the same moral government over all of them, and to whom, therefore, individual effort and virtue was infinitely more valuable than the status conferred by merely human social or religious constructs. The Dnyanodaya also contained a large section of correspondence from its readers in each issue, that

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largely reflected its own opinions.

4. Missionary polemic: the ascending levels of Christian truth.

The partial acceptance among Hindu reformers and radicals of the ideological framework of Christian belief and its claims to a monopoly of secular scientific truth was naturally shaped by the points at which basic Christian ideas about the relationship between God and the world conflicted with their equivalent in popular Hinduism. While protestant Christianity envisaged a unique Creator, existing distinct from the material and social world, popular Hinduism described a vast number of sacred beings, and a natural world still inhabited by supernatural powers and possessed of religious significance. Thus, the dichotomy between pure and impure was perceived as inherent in material objects, and, as Louis Dumont has

28. The Dnyanodaya began as a monthly paper in 1842, published from Ahmadnagar. From 1845 it was published from Bombay twice monthly until 1873, when it became a weekly. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any precise circulation figures for the paper. There are subscription lists which appear at the back of each issue, but it is hard to calculate an overall circulation from these. What they do reflect is a very wide range of subscribers, both British and Indian, missionary and administrator, Christian and Hindu. For example, the Dnyanodaya for 1 October 1851 listed 44 subscribers, some of which were for one year, but 25 of which were for a longer period. 24 of these names were Hindu, the rest British. Amongst the Hindus were 'Jothi Govind Fulmally' and Baba Padmanji, the famous Hindu reformer who was to be converted in 1854. In arguing for a wide circulation of the paper amongst the reformers, I am also relying on the frequency with which reformers themselves mention it as an influence. Baba Padmanji mentions that he used to read it at home in Belgaum, where his uncle was a subscriber, and he later took out ten subscriptions so that he could distribute the paper amongst his friends. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, Bombay 1888, (Marathi), pp. 159-160.

argued, formed the guiding principle in the construction of social hierarchies.[29] In Christian thought, the deity existed as the very principle of purity, and as the source of moral government, that exercised the same authority over all his human creatures, and distinguished them from all other beings. Hindu gods, on the other hand, could commit harmful acts; the concern of the individual Hindu was to propitiate them, and in this task Brahmans or priests of other castes occupied a special position as mediators. Moreover, popular Hinduism envisaged no special moral sphere for man. Like all living beings, he was caught up in the same cycles of rebirth and subject in the same way to the law of karma. The Christian envisaged worldly life as a once and for all affair, his soul as a unique creation of God, its ultimate fate dependent upon his worldly conduct. Religious merit derived from his individual faith and conduct within the framework provided by the redemption of sin in Christ. Religious merit in Hindu thought consisted primarily in obedience to the dharma of a present social position, and all worldly concerns appeared ultimately only as the illusion that kept the spirit from liberation in moksa. Finally, the two differed in their account of the legitimation of social hierarchies and the nature of social justice. In protestant Christian theory, all men shared an original spiritual equality before God, and Christianity deprecated human status derived from merely human social or religious hierarchies as compared to the merit of individual faith and virtue. This emphasis on individual merit and the concept of original human equality gave rise to a univer-

29. Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, London 1970, Chapter Two.

sally valid ethic for the construction of human societies, and formed their only ultimate source of legitimacy. In this way, the individual could look upon the social order as an arena for the potential realisation of the religious value of the original spiritual equality of men, whose ultimate source was an extra-worldly God. The conflict with the values of popular Hinduism here - which was to be of crucial significance for social reform ideas - lay in popular Hinduism's conception of the existing social order as an absolute fixity. Through the doctrine of karma, the structure of society was in itself the final realisation of a religious justice inherent in the social process itself. Rather than seeking to make inherent religious values a reality in the social order, the individual's attitude should be one of acceptance and a search for release from all worldly existence. The positive inhibition of social radicalism evident here, the devaluation of worldly life, and the social conservatism of Hindu thought impelled all potential social reformers beyond this framework of thought to search for a set of social and religious values that would place reform efforts at the centre of human concern.[30]

With these tensions in mind, we turn now to examine the component elements of the worldview of early nineteenth century Christianity, as they emerged in the missionary assault upon Hindu beliefs. First, there was the basic conviction of a unique Creator, the source

30. It will be obvious that for this very schematised account I have drawn heavily on Max Weber, The Religion of India, Free Press, London 1967, especially the chapter 'The anti-orgiastic and ritualistic character of Brahmanical religiosity'.

of all purity and the absolute arbiter of human conduct. Implicit in this was the idea of a special moral sphere for man. The Hindu depiction of the divine nature depicted gods sometimes cruel, capricious and unjust, and so left man without any ultimate spiritual guide for his worldly conduct. This was one of John Wilson's central points in his Exposure of the Hindoo religion.[31] In his very popular Letters to Indian Youth, Murray Mitchell made the same point in the contrast with Hindu doctrines. Many Hindus to whom he had argued the truth of the Christian faith had replied that each society should keep to its own traditional religion, which would provide the path to spiritual fulfilment most suited to its own conditions and needs. Murray Mitchell denied this: 'It is inconceivable that God should reveal one system in Asia, and other systems, contradictory to the former, in Europe or Africa'.[32] Hinduism, moreover, had no distinct idea of a unique Creator; some Hindu ideas of the divine nature were pantheistic, some polytheistic. Sometimes the divine nature was represented as without qualities, and sometimes the qualities ascribed to it were of the most offensive kind. The Dnyanodaya contained repeated references to these contrasting accounts of the divine nature, lamenting the spiritual poverty of Hinduism's view, and its terrible social consequences in a variety of cruel and senseless religious practices: hookswinging in the service of the god Khandoba, the religious prostitution of muralis and vaghyas and

31. John Wilson, An Exposure of the Hindoo Religion. P. 39.

32. Murray Mitchell, Letters to Indian Youth. p. 87.

the immorality of the Holi festival.[33] Against these ideas, the Dnyanodaya argued that God was pure and holy, and could in no way be pleased by such practices. It was his wish that all should love Him and be happy, and not that they should inflict such tortures upon themselves.[34] This more general assertion of the nature of God, and its conflict with many Hindu practices, was polemically far more effective than would have been a crude emphasis on specific points of Christian doctrine.

Another major element in the Christian account of the moral framework of man's relations with God and his fellow men that was to be adopted by social reformers consisted in the idea of an original, pre-social human equality before God, and an account of human merit

33. The god Khandoba, an incarnation of Siva, was the guardian deity of the Deccan, most popular amongst the agricultural castes. His devotees practiced one of the forms of worship, in return for or in the hope of granting some request, that most outraged missionary and liberal European observers: swinging round a pole, often set up on a cart to be drawn in triumph around the temple, by means of a hook inserted into the worshipper's back. Muralis and vaghayas were religious prostitutes of all castes, whose parents dedicated them to the service of the local temple. The Holi is the festival held at the spring equinox, that proved offensive to missionaries through its acceptance of public displays of obscene language and behaviour. See the Dnyanodaya, 15 January 1844, for an essay on the practice of hookswinging, and 15 May 1849, for a Prize Essay written by a Hindu on the iniquities of the Holi festival.

34. Dnyanodaya, 15 January 1844.

in society which valued individual effort above the status conferred by merely human hierarchies. This classic opposition between subjective and ascriptive values was the perspective from which the main missionary attack on caste was launched, and the argument that caste represented a Brahman conspiracy. Here again, the effectiveness of missionary criticism in influencing potential social reformers lay in its ability to present an account of the relations between God and man which seemed to transcend all specific religious confessions, to represent the bare essentials of universal religious and moral truth, and to appear as a self-sufficient framework of ideas, that might be used in the relief of India's apparent material and social difficulties.

This opposition between ascriptive and subjective values resolved itself into four main arguments as it was presented in missionary thought, of which three concern us most directly. The first was the idea that God had created all men in a basic spiritual equality, and the second, that religious merit or social status should be a function of individual conduct, and not ascribed by birth, or by a predetermined system of hierarchical values. Associated in missionary argument with this second statement was invariably a critique of the social consequences of the application of ascriptive values, in particular upon women and the lower castes. The third argument asserted that the system of ascriptive values so pre-eminently represented in caste had no origins in the divine intention, but represented the carefully constructed edifice of Brahman self-interest. All three arguments implied an exhilarating new degree of individual freedom

and responsibility in worldly life for the potential social reformer, an assertion of the idea that each individual should reap what he had sown, as against the more socially conservative Hindu emphasis on karma. The fourth argument was that atonement for sin was not to be found in the performance of external observances, but in individual virtue and the redemptive power of Christ. This last argument represented the level at which the ideological framework of Christian belief merged into the Christian confession itself.

The idea of a basic spiritual equality among men formed a constant theme in the correspondence of the Dnyanodaya. A good example occurred in September 1842, in one of its very first issues, when it reprinted an extract from the Prabhakar newspaper, then edited by the leading social and religious reformer Balsastri Jambhekar. The article consisted of a letter to the Prabhakar criticising a correspondent who had argued that faithful Hindus should not send their children to learn English, because scholars at the Elphinstone Institution and those taught English by the missionaries soon became disillusioned with their own religion, convinced that the Christian religion offered, if not absolute religious truth, at least the most socially beneficial account of the relations between God and man, and were persuaded that there were no natural divisions between men such as that of caste, but only the physical difference between men and women. The correspondent, who signed himself 'an Elphinstone scholar' and whose rejoinder the editor of the Dnyanodaya quoted with intense approval, complained that whenever anyone criticised Hinduism, Hindus themselves automatically assumed that they had converted to

Christianity. But, he argued, there was no inherent connection between these obvious truths of human existence and the specific language and confession of Christianity. English was only a language; it had no connection with any religion. Why did the orthodox not accuse reformers of having converted to Islah, since there was as much logical connection between that religion and these fundamental principles of man's spiritual and moral condition as there was with Christianity. In any case, he argued, it was quite true that there were not natural divisions between men except for that between the sexes. Here, in typical reformist fashion, he drew on the obvious 'facts' of God's creation to argue his case for the dismantling of the elaborate social constructs that dominated Indian life:

> 'See, when God made the earth, he made divisions between birds, beasts and men. If he had intended such distinctions amongst men themselves, why did he not make them obvious...giving Brahmans one extra mouth, or Ksatriyas two extra hands, or Sudras extra feet? But wherever you see men, they have two hands, two feet, two eyes, two ears, one nose and one mouth, whatever their kind or country. Then God could not have had it in mind to create many castes among men. And the system of caste, that is only practised in India, is caused by the Brahmans to maintain their superiority.' 35

From the idea of original spiritual equality, missionary Christianity moved to the conclusion that religious merit, in so far as it rested in human hands at all, derived from individual virtue. This was set out in the Dnyanodaya of 1 August 1845, where a native catechist described his disputation with a patil in a village just outside Pune, who had tried to prevent him from

35. Dnyanodaya, 1 September 1842.

sleeping in the village cavadi for the night, on the grounds that as a Christian he mixed freely with the lower castes:

> 'I explained to him and to many others present that there is in fact no distinction of caste, and that there is no impurity contracted in eating or drinking from any other person's hands. I then asked them: "How is it according to your sastras? To a good honest pious Mahar will God say, you are a Mahar and therefore you must not come near me? And to a wicked Brahman, will God say, you are a Brahman, no matter how wicked you are, come and remain with me? No, on the contrary, in the sight of God, there is only one distinction - that of righteous and wicked" '.

The Dnyanodaya frequently stressed the social benefits that would follow from the rejection of ascriptive values. An article of 15 November 1848 pointed out the differences between Hindu and western societies, and gave a long list of examples of eminent people in Europe and America who had risen to greatness from very humble origins, to the great advantage of the community. The social groups most disadvantaged by the ascription of social roles in conventional Hindu society formed a special subject of concern in missionary polemic. The refusal of the British government to take a firmer stand on the human rights of the lower castes formed a constant subject of complaint. A typical example occurred in 1851, when the Board of Education, after much heart-searching, had decided that it could not admit Mahar boys to government schools. The Dnyanodaya protested bitterly against this deference to a set of

social rules that took no account of individual qualities.[36] A similar logic was evident in the attitudes of low caste converts to Christianity. In 1855, there was a spate of letters to the Dnyanodaya, describing the sufferings of the low castes in Hinduism. The most striking of these appeared on 15 March 1855, and combined this admiration for Christianity's regard for human equality with an account of the historical evolution of caste from the Brahman conquest at the Aryan invasions. This strikingly foreshadowed Phule's location of the struggle of the low castes within the historical perspective of Brahman conquest and an ideological framework for social reconstruction taken indirectly from missionary Christianity. The letter began with the origins of low caste social disabilities. The Mahars and Mangs had represented the most powerful social groups in India at the time of the Aryan invasions . In order to subdue them the more effectively, the conquerors

36. This case formed the subject of a long correspondence in the records of the Bombay government. Another similar case occurred in 1856, when a Mahar boy was refused admission to the government school at Dharwar. This correspondence is summarised in the Report of the Director of Public Instruction to the Department of Education for 1856-1857, pp. 88-93. The Dnyanodaya commented on the refusal of Mang and Mahar children: 'If it is thought that the natives after receiving all the advantages of education have not yet learned the principles of kindness and mercy towards the despised Mahars and Mangs, then we would ask of what use are all the Government schools which have been established hitherto?'. Dnyanodaya, 15 February 1858. For a complete account of the dispute, see A.J. Roberts, Education and Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1840-1858, London University Ph.D. thesis, 1974, pp. 163-178.

arranged for their social isolation in the organisation of caste, and from that time their sufferings had begun. Now, the writer went on, some young Hindu reformers were regretting the sins of their ancestors, realising that the low castes were human after all. But for any real appreciation of human spiritual and social equality, Christian values stood foremost.

The social condition of women formed another major source of concern in missionary polemic. The prohibition of widow remarriage, the disinclination towards the education of women and the practice of child marriage formed the foci of criticism. The fundamental principle behind these complaints did not concern actual material hardship, although extreme social practices did give rise to very harsh criticism. It concerned instead the denial to women of any social value or status as individuals outside their ascribed social roles as wives, mothers or daughters, and the origin of this circumscription of their development as individuals in the traditional conviction of their moral weakness. Missionary arguments also projected a radical change in the relations between men and women in marriage, arguing for a closer union based on individual compatibility and companionship, rather than a relationship which consisted largely in the formal fulfilment of the roles of husband and wife. These arguments were exemplified in an address given by the American missionary, the Rev. Ballantine, to the Ahmadnagar Debating Society in October 1855, which had been founded by the American missionaries as a means of promoting discussion and criticism of Hindu social practices in the smaller towns and villages around Ahmadnagar.[37]

37. Dnyanodaya, 15 October 1855.

The third argument into which the opposition between ascriptive and subjective values resolved itself concerned the role of Brahmans in constructing and maintaining caste as an instrument of their own self interest. The criticism of Brahmans as a social group was, of course, a familiar theme in the social reform literature of the period, but it is necessary to distinguish between missionary arguments, from which radicals like Phule tended to draw inspiration, and the arguments of moderate and high-caste social reformers, who complained rather that Brahmans had failed in their natural task of social leadership. Missionary polemic laid a far greater emphasis on the idea of a deliberate Brahman conspiracy to enjoy social privileges with as little effort as possible, while more moderate reform writers tended to regard them as the victims of their own weakness. The missionary argument was neatly summarised in the Scottish missionary Robert Nesbit's pamphlet, written for the Bombay Tract and Book Society in 1834, entitled The Brahman's Claims. Nesbit's tachnique lay in comparing the sastric statements of Brahmanic privilege and power with their real human weakness in common with all God's other creatures. While he did not press the idea of a conscious Brahman conspiracy passed on from one generation to the next, he certainly suggested that Brahmans had written the books upon which their intensely privileged position was based, and that this had involved a considerable degree of falsification, which had gone unchallenged merely because of the ignorance of Hindus more generally. These anti-Brahman ideas, re-enforced by the violent

anti-clericalism of European religious radicalism, were to prove a powerful influence on the development of Phule's ideas.

The next major element in the ideological framework, within which missionary polemic presented Christian doctrine, concerned the presentation of the natural world and the material universe. This ideological framework was lent both objective conviction by its linkage, in missionary polemic, with the discovery of apparently irrefutable truths about the material universe, and enormous attraction by the view of the possibilities for material benefit and self-determination in human society that it implied. This is not simply to argue that science in early nineteenth century Europe had developed a greater accuracy in its account of the material world than was to be found in Hindu writings. The acceptance among Hindu reformers and radicals of early nineteenth century ideas about the relationship between science and religion never reflected merely a belief in their superior accuracy. For moderate reformers, concerned with India's apparent material and social disadvantages, what was important was the projection of man's ability to use his secular reason to understand and exploit the material world for his own benefit. Radicals like Phule, on the other hand, whose concern lay rather in the struggle for internal social justice, in the dismantling of social and religious hierarchies and the provision of a basis of legitimacy for reformed values, tended to use the missionary presentation of these scientific ideas for much the same polemical purposes as missionaries themselves.

Much missionary material was drawn from works of natural

theology that were written in the eighteenth century. The Dnyanodaya carried translations from Addison's Spectator on natural theology and the works of creation.[38] Other popular works on the natural sciences were William Paley's Natural Theology, which formed an important part of the curriculum of the Scottish Free Church Institution in Bombay, and M. Gallaudet's A Youth's Book of Natural Theology, which was translated into Marathi in 1850 and serialised in the Dnyanodaya.[39] The arguments of natural theology were very much in line with missionary strategies of leading Hindus to a properly Christian idea of the Creator from the evidences of his creation.

Missionary Christianity's use of arguments about the material world consisted of three stages. The first concerned the fundamental principle of the expulsion of the sacred from the natural world; the assertion that neither the material universe nor natural objects contained divine powers or magical properties. This ran contrary to quite central areas of popular Hindu belief and social practice: the endowment of natural phenomena, such as the movements of the planets, with a magical significance in human affairs, and, even more importantly, the construction of the social distinctions of caste upon the belief of a purity or pollution inherent in material objects. Christianity presented a material world in which the natural properties of things had no such social or religious significance for man. The only significance of material objects for human society lay in their usefulness for man's support and comfort.

38. See, for example, Dnyanodaya 15 June 1850.

39. See the account of his education at the Scottish Mission's Institution in Bombay in Baba Padmanji, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

This was a reflection of the intentions of God, who had created the world for man's support and enjoyment. This contrast of attitudes was exemplified in a letter written to the Dnyanodaya on 1 March 1845, from a Mahar convert to Christianity. He related how he had visited a village near Ahmadnagar with one of the American missionaries, and had drawn water for him from the village well. Subsequently, he heard that the villagers had purified it.

> 'Hearing that they had purified the well, you will probably think that some rubbish had got into it, and that they had cleaned it all out and made it fit for human consumption. Not at all. They brought along cow's urine and poured it in. It was not even that they added just a little; they poured in as much as they could lay their hands on. So you can judge for yourself how pure the water of that well was - ugh! How much more filthy must it have become after they had filled it up with excrement! God created water on this earth for the use of all men and creatures, and even if thousands of Mahars and Mangs touched it, then still neither its colour nor its properties would change; it would stay just as it is. But the water really was polluted when they put urine and other filthy things in it!

This led on to the second argument, the idea of a Creator removed from his physical creation. It was only by this process of desacralising nature that the idea of the divine could assume a new form. The disassociation of God from the physical world freed him to become the omnipotent Creator, the source of all moral and spiritual government of Christian ideology, and allowed Hindu reformist and radical assumptions about the nature of the divine to assume the same form. This progression was beautifully illustrated in the Scottish missionary Robert Nesbit's account of his standard method of confronting idol-worshippers on his tours of Hindu centres of pilgrimage. He recounted the following conversation at the village of

Khardi in the Deccan:

Hindu: "A form is necessary to worship, because God is invisible".
Missionary: "Well, after you get the form, do you worship it or something else? Do you worship the stone?"
Hindu: "We worship the god that is brought into the stone".
Missionary: "Do you see that god?"
Hindu: "No".
Missionary: "Well, then, what do you gain by the stone? What is the use of it? God is invisible without it and he is just as invisible with it. If you wish a help to the worship of God, look abroad upon the earth and the sky. These exhibit his works; and from the works you may know 'the eternal power and Godhead' of Him that that worketh". 40

This progression of ideas was to be repeated almost exactly in Phule's first attack on orthodox religious values.

The third argument consisted in the idea of the natural world itself that was projected: in its beauty and harmony, accessible to man's reason and available for his support, testimony to the power and benevolence of the divine nature. It contrasted the enlightened happiness of man's material life in Christian societies with the ignorance and fear that kept Hindus from a realisation of their real freedom. In 1846, the Dnyanodaya announced the publication of a new native almanac. This would take the place of the traditional almanac prepared by Hindu astrologers, that predicted the events of the year from the movements of the planets, so that Hindus could perform ceremonies at auspicious times and present offerings to the gods to avert the evil predicted from the appearance of comets, meteors or eclipses. The Dnyanodaya explained that these

40. Murray Mitchell, A Memoir of Robert Nesbit, pp.386-387

beliefs were common in all countries where the workings of the solar system were not properly understood, and where 'those who are able to determine beforehand the time of eclipses, etc., have made this a means of establishing an influence over the minds of the people'. On the other hand, 'Among the English and other enlightened nations, the science of astronomy has been much cultivated, and the causes of the curious phenomena of the heavens are generally understood. Hence, they no longer regard these things as omens either of good or ill. And their pity is excited when they see how much the ignorant and superstitious are troubled by these appearances'.[41] The new Marathi almanac contained an account of the solar system, the causes of eclipses, the theories of tides, ways of determining the time of sunrise and sunset, the calculation of latitude and longitude, together with more general information about the religious systems of the world, the judicial systems of western India, government institutions and rules for the appointment of government officers. Published every year, the almanac emphasised that civilised man could understand the material universe, plan his activities on the basis of his own interest and comfort and trust his own labour and judgement, rather than looking to the movements of the stars.

5. Missionary polemic and the attack on legitimacy.

Besides the immense appeal of the ideological framework of Christian belief, missionary Christianity derived great polemical advantages from the unspoken assumptions upon which the debates were conducted. In almost all of the public exchanges between missionaries,

41. Dnyanodaya, 1 October 1846.

reformers and the orthodox, the criteria for religious rectitude that were applied to the relationship between religious texts and current practices and beliefs were drawn from an essentially Christian model.

The important religious texts of Hinduism, from the Vedas and the Upanishads to the numerous versions of the puranas, did of course, play a part in underpinning contemporary religious practices. However, this process of legitimation did not consist, as it did in Christianity, of a fairly consistent and comprehensive set of moral norms and prohibitions, which were to be taken to heart by every member of the faithful, and translated into practice in everyday life. As many missionary polemicists pointed out, indeed, most Hindus were unaware even of the content of the most sacred of the Hindu writings, while their familiarity with the puranic tales of popular Hinduism was limited to what they could gather from local oral traditions.[42] While Christian beliefs and practices could ultimately be referred to a single text, the Bible, for their legitimacy, the religious division of social groups in caste was referred to different levels of religious purity, and one sign of this purity was access to the most sacred religious texts. It was an inherent part of Brahman religious privilege to be able to repeat parts of the Vedas; a Brahman's contact with the Vedas, spoken by Brahma himself, represented an important part of his religious power over lower castes denied such access.[43] Although the very

42. See Baba Padmanji's account of his early Hindu beliefs on pp. 157-160.

43. Max Weber, op. cit., p. 155.

structural divisions between Brahmans and other castes were outlined and justified in Hindu religious texts, the most detailed prescriptions for caste divisions were not - as missionary polemicists were quick to point out - contained in Hinduism's oldest and most sacred writings. The social role of the latter, in maintaining and legitimating the hierarchies of caste, referred less, then, to their actual contents, and more to the effects of differential access to them, in reinforcing the religious charisma of Brahmans themselves.

The other important source of legitimacy for religious hierarchies and popular beliefs consisted in the force of literal social prescription. No complaint was repeated more often by missionaries and social reformers than that Hindus feared above all to depart from the religion of their fathers, and missionaries at least found this lack of an individual or 'rational' argument for them infuriating and incomprehensible.[44] This mode of justification contained an inherent vulnerability, which missionaries did their best to exploit. The importance of prescription in popular Hinduism was almost certainly reinforced in the impression of the eternal religious consistency of Hindu belief stretching back into antiquity, that was conveyed by the continuing viability of very old religious texts in upholding nineteenth century systems of religious authority. However, as we have seen, this referred more to the effects of differential

44. Murray Mitchell, for example, complained that on his preaching tours in western India, one of the arguments most frequently advanced in defence of idol worship was 'Our forefathers established this worship. They were far wiser than we. How dare we set the worship aside?'. Murray Mitchell, In Western India, p.84.

access than to the injunctions of their contents; indeed, many of these injunctions would have constituted the most flagrant breaches of nineteenth century beliefs. The survival of very old texts seemed, therefore, to guarantee a consistency in religious practice which it never in fact produced. This resulted in the anomaly in popular Hinduism of a great faith in the normative power of prescription in a religious tradition that contained radical and relatively recent innovations.

Missionary polemic both sought to exploit internal tensions such as these, and to impose upon the conduct of the debates criteria that were drawn from Christian models of legitimation rather than Hindu. It was able to assert that many contemporary practices and beliefs should be abandoned because they had no scriptural authority, and that Hinduism as a religion had failed in its duty to its followers by neglecting to inform them about its most sacred texts. The translation and publication of Hindu religious texts, and the publication of information about ancient Hindu society and the changes that its social structure and religious practices had undergone since Vedic times, also formed a very important part of missionary strategy. Here, missionary polemicists were able to draw on and produce popularised versions of the voluminous research of European scholars. Through this, they tried to exploit popular Hinduism's faith in prescription by pointing out that many of its central tenets represented comparatively recent innovations, and that since Vedic times, it had changed beyond all recognition. They

attempted to undermine the legitimation of Brahman superiority through differential access to sacred texts by the large-scale printing and circulation of the texts themselves, and by emphasising the apparent discrepancy between the power of the texts in maintaining the mystique of Brahmanhood, and their actual contents, in descriptions of the worship of the elements, which seemed to bear very little connection with nineteenth century popular Hinduism. Indeed, it was a common complaint among radicals and converts that their first reading of Marathi translations of some parts of the Vedas had been a tremendous anti-climax: after the pre-eminence that they had enjoyed in traditional religious life, their actual contents came as a great disappointment.[45] Missionary polemicists also argued a discrepancy between these texts and contemporary religious practices, applying an essentially Christian model of what their relation should be.

The idea that Hinduism had failed its believers in not providing them with a consistent and intelligible religious text that would guide them in their everyday lives formed a persistent criticism. Associated with it was always the idea that Brahmans perpetuated this state of affairs themselves, in order to keep the real weakness of the religious texts upon which their authority was supposedly founded, hidden from ordinary Hindus. John Wilson made precisely this point in the debates of the early 1830's, arguing that Hindus 'are thus, in a great degree, prevented from thinking for themselves'.[46] The Dnyanodaya made the same point repeatedly.

45. This was certainly Baba Padmanji's experience; .see p. 158.

46. John Wilson, A Second Exposure of the Hindu Religion. pp. 12-13.

In an article of 1 November 1854, it asserted that 'the millions of Hindus in India, since for the most part they do not understand Sanskrit, are ignorant of their religion and like poor fools are practising they know not what'. This projection of a religious text available to all for the guidance of their practical lives, in place of the religious purposes served in traditional Hindu society by the most sacred texts, was to have a great effect on reformist and radical views of the proper function of a religious text amongst the community of believers. Radicals like Phule came to see in the traditional functioning of Hindu sacred texts a source of social control, the evidence of a Brahman conspiracy to defraud ordinary Hindus, and to demand a text that, after the Christian model, would be available to all and act as a guide for conduct in everyday life. This shift was reflected in a remarkable letter written to the Dnyanodaya by a fourteen year old girl of the Mang caste who was a pupil at Phule's school for the education of untouchable children. The letter lamented the lack of a religious text for the use of untouchable castes:

> 'The Brahmans, who are very fond of their creature comforts, say that the Vedas belong exclusively to them. So it is clear that we ourselves have no religious book. If the Vedas are for the Brahmans, then they should conduct their behaviour according to them. If we are not free to look at any religious book at all, then is it not clear that we are deprived of religion!'. 47

Missionary polemicists also hoped that their strategy of publishing religious texts in translation, of serialising extracts from these in missionary periodicals and of bringing out a Bombay

47. Dnyanodaya, 15 February 1855.

Tract and Book Society pamphlet, What is in the Veda, would both exploit this disjunction between religious content and religious significance, and would demonstrate the historical inconsistencies in the evolution of Hindu religious beliefs.[48] The Dnyanodaya of 1 November 1845 advised its readers of the benefits of each individual's being able to take hold of a copy of the Vedas in his hand and read them for himself so that he could see what they actually contained, adding that copies could be procured cheaply from Colonel Stevenson in Pune. In his Letters to Indian Youth, Murray Mitchell put forward what he clearly hoped would be the effect of this individual reading: 'Hindus speak of the Vedas as the authoritative representation of Hinduism; but none can be more astonished at the religion of the Vedas than the Hindus must be themselves'.[49]

Missionary propaganda also attempted to undermine the legitimacy of traditional practices by showing that they were quite recent innovations, running counter to the ancient beliefs of Vedic society. John Wilson's book, India Three Thousand Years Ago, published in 1858, set out to describe the origins of the Aryan people, their arrival in the subcontinent and their conflicts with the indigenous tribes, the nature of their customs and religious beliefs. As well as showing the historical inconsistencies of Hindu religion, Wilson's writings and their popularisation and serialisation in missionary periodicals provided additional

48. This was written by Baba Padmanji, and published in 1880.

49. Murray Mitchell, Letters to Indian Youth, p.110.

ammunition for radicals like Phule, in the very proposition of the alien origins of the higher castes in India. Wilson began by describing the origins of the Aryan races, their subjugation of the tribes that they found in the subcontinent and the beginnings of Aryan culture in India. Quoting the Sanskrit scholar H.H. Wilson, he described how the indigenous tribes harrassed the Aryans and attempted to disrupt their religious practices. The terms dasya, rakshas, ugras, pishchas, asura, yakshas, shigravas and kikatas, which recurred so frequently in the early Sanskrit texts, all referred to the indigenous tribes of India who resented the presence of the Aryans and attempted to spoil their religious rites.[50] Wilson then went on to argue that caste was never part of the social system of ancient India. The Brahmans were represented in the Vedas merely as a profession, not a caste. It was possible to trace their rise as a matter of group ambition: 'His study and learning gradually increased his influence, and he was constituted an adviser and counsellor. His supposed peculiar access to the gods gave him a peculiar sanctity. He became a legislator, and in this capacity, he soon made himself a god upon earth'.[51]

The term Ksatriya had originally possessed no connotations of caste, but had a variety of meanings in the Vedas. Here again, Phule was to find material for his own interpretation. Wilson described how 'the term Kshatriya, applied by the sastras or Law Book to the second or warrior class in the Hindu community, is used in the vedas only as a denominative of a party possessed of kshatra,

50. John Wilson, India Three Thousand Years Ago, Bombay 1858, pp. 19-21.

51. ibid., p. 47.

or power. In this sense, it is applied to the gods, as to Indra and Varuna. In the vedas, the word kshetrapati, "the owner of a field", is the name of a person possessing landed property; and the name kashatrapati, "the possessor of power", seems to have been applicable to any party exercising authority of any kind or extent. Kshatriya is the equivalent of Kshatrapati'.[52]

Neither did the religious beliefs and practices of nineteenth century Hinduism have any greater connection with Vedic religion. The practice of sati and of infant marriage were unknown in Vedic society; women 'suffered from nothing like the exclusion and confinement of modern times'.[53] Finally, the hierarchies of caste and the idea of ritual pollution were nowhere to be found in Vedic society. Wilson expressed the hope that this information 'may aid some timid souls in dealing with caste, that heavy and galling, and degrading yoke, which cannot too soon be voluntarily wrenched by the natives from their own necks'. 54.

6. European religious radicalism in mid-nineteenth century western India.

Beside the detailed and extensive evidence for the worldview of missionary Christianity, information about the circulation of

52. John Wilson, India Three Thousand Years Ago, Bombay 1858. p. 52

53. ibid. p. 69

54. ibid., pp 61. Another good example of this missionary attempt to exploit the differences between Vedic beliefs and those of nineteenth century Hinduism was a course of lectures on the Vedas given by the missionary Reverend A. White, reported in the Dnyanodaya, 1 August 1861. White described how the gods of the Vedas performed animal sacrifices, drank intoxicating substances, quarrelled and concerned themselves only with their own selfish desires.

radical ideas in religion from Europe is difficult to find. There is enough evidence, however, to indicate their importance in the shaping of reform opinion. It is possible to distinguish three sets of ideas, taken from the radical critics of established religion associated with the French Enlightenment, and from the radicalism in political thought in France and England, in the three decades after the French Revolution. First, there was the deist attack on revealed religion, and the assertion that none of the world's religions contained a direct revelation from God, but were usually the product of men, and, in their organised form, the instrument of delusion, if not of actual oppression. In place of revealed religions, with their burdensome ritual and obedience to arbitrary religious texts, deist thinkers substituted the simple idea of a single Creator who was to be worshipped the same by all men. This was consistent with man's reason, which told him of the existence of the Creator, from the evidence of the world around him. Associated with this idea of the Creator in European deism was a view of ethics and moral conduct based on the simple idea of human reciprocity. The foundation of all morality was provided by man's need for self preservation. Moral good consisted in whatever preserved and ameliorated the condition of mankind; and evil, whatever tended to its destruction and harm. Third, there was the concern with the individual that marked the religious and political radicalism of the late eighteenth century: the emphasis upon the natural rights of the individual as determining the legitimacy of

the authority imposed upon him in society, and the idea that every individual should be able to enjoy his own opinions in religious and political matters, and subject traditional institutions to free discussion and criticism.[55]

In Arunodaya, his autobiography, the convert Baba Padmanji described how widely deist criticisms of revealed religion were spread in western-educated circles in the mid-century. Padmanji, born in 1831 at Belgaum, in a family of the Kasar caste,[56] the son of a Public Works Department supervisor, was educated at the High School of the London Mission Society in Belgaum, then went to Bombay to the Free Church of Scotland's Institution. There, he came under the influence of the famous convert Narayan Sheshadri,[57] and after several years of intellectual and spiritual turmoil, he

55. This is a very broad summary, but it does represent the most common arguments of the religious and political radicals of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century France and England. What is important is not so much the intellectual difference between individual radicals, but the revolutionary novelty of the ideas themselves, in an intellectual and religious tradition that held firmly to the idea of revelation in religion and lacked any strong idea of individual natural rights.

56. Kasars were a caste of braziers.

57. The Brahman convert Narayan Sheshadri was the elder brother of Sripat Sheshadri, at the centre of the famous controversy in Bombay, concerning the re-admission of the boy to the caste after he had lived with his convert brother. For an account of the dispute, which split Brahman opinion in Bombay, see Murray Mitchell, In Western India, pp. 105-111.

was baptized in 1854. In his baptismal address, describing the background to his conversion, he told his audience:

> 'I regularly carried on my study of the Christian religion. I saw the evidence that there was for it, and read the opinions of the European atheists against it, and also read the answers given to them by the former. The names of the anti-Christian books that I read were: the books of Tom Paine, the Free Thinkers Magazine, the Critical Review, Volney, Gibbon and Hume, and a book by a Parsi in Bombay'. 58.

The works of Voltaire were also discussed in the Free Church Institution.[59] Padmanji became a member of the theistic society, the Paramahansa Mandali, before his conversion, and recorded how he had read a paper to the society one evening, when 'some learned group, having come down from Pune, put forward opinions of an atheistical kind while my paper was being discussed'. The president of the society, Ramacandra Balakrsna Jayakar, himself later shocked the more conventional members of the society by joining the atheist group in Pune, although he claimed that he had only done so for the sake of the fascinating discussions that they held.[60] A letter from Padmanji to the Dnyanprakash also described

58. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, pp. 373-374.

59. ibid., p. 256.

60. ibid., pp. 193-194. Ramacandra Balakrsna Jayakar, to whom Phule dedicated his A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale Bombay 1869 (Marathi) was an Assistant Commissioner of the Customs and a Justice of the Peace. He became President of the Paramahansa Mandali when he left the Customs Department and became Daftardar to a Mr. Spooner.

the growth of radical ideas in religion, and Padmanji's own dismay at the decline in religious faith:

> 'By means of knowledge, many Hindus' faith in their religion has left them. They have rejected caste divisions and the worship of idols. It is openly said that Ram, Krsna and other avatars were merely human beings. How can one call these people Hindu any longer? I think that they did the right thing. But I do not understand what will become of people who won't accept Hindu, or Christian or any other religion; to them, all their education, learning, morals and good behaviour, have all become like poison. Some of them say that there is one God, and it is enough to worship him. Others say, let us eat, drink and be merry, then when we die, that is the end'. 61

Padmanji's friend, Kasam Mahadmadji, also a member of the Paramahansa Mandali and later baptized, recalled his experience of deist and atheist ideas in the 1840's and 1850's, in a letter to Padmanji:

> 'When we were at school, reformist groups in Pune and Bombay used to print and send us selected passages of atheist opinions from the books of the famous foreign atheists Tom Paine and Voltaire; and in Pune, some of the disciples of Professor Green [62] used to meet us in secret and tell us that there was no author of the universe, and that rules about ethics are observed only for the convenient arrangement of society'.

Though Mahamadji and his friends never became outright atheists, they still thought that 'Paramesvara is the author of the universe, and he has not given us any sastra, but our own reason is enough for us to understand all our duties'.[63] Another friend of Padmanji's,

61. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, p. 350.

62. It is possible that this may be the same Green with whom the radical Dadoba Pandurang lived in Surat, since both were teachers and held strong deist and radical beliefs. See p. 135.

63. Reprinted in Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, pp. 363-364.

Narayan Raghunath, who was at the Robert Money Institution, recalled how two members of the Paramahansa Mandali had tried to destroy his regard for Christian doctrines by telling him that 'the Bible was full of absurdities, errors and immoralities. As I used to take infinite delight in reading books written by the most celebrated infidel writers of England and Europe, as well as those written in defence of the Christian religion, these two brothers did not succeed in converting me to their views'.[64]

The 'book by a Parsi in Bombay' mentioned by Padmanji was almost certainly the Talim-i-Zartosht, 'The Doctrine of Zoroaster in the Gujurathi Language for the Instruction of Parsi Youth'. A review of this long book, of 268 pages, appeared in the Bombay United Services Gazette, a copy of which was sent by John Wilson to Dr. Brunton, the Convenor of the Scottish General Assembly's Convention on Missions.[65] This book, said by its author to have been prepared at the request of the Parsi Panchayet for the refutation of John Wilson's attack on the Vendidad,[66] shows how European religious radicalism had been adopted as an important means of refuting Christian attacks amongst Parsis as well as Hindus. According to the review, the book used a lot of material from Gibbon and from Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary. Like European religious

64. Reprinted in Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, p. 407.

65. John Wilson to the Reverend Dr. Brunton, Bombay, 28 August 1840, National Library of Scotland, MSS vol. 7532(1), f.68-68v.

66. John Wilson, Lecture on the Vendidad Sade of the Parsis, delivered at Bombay on 19th and 26th June 1883. American Mission Press, Bombay 1883. Wilson in turn refuted this book with The Parsi Religion, as contained in the Zand Avasta, and Propagated and defined by the Zoroastrians of India and Persia, unfolded, refuted and contrasted with Christianity. Bombay 1843.

radicals, the book emphasised the internal inconsistencies of Christian doctrine. It argued that the recent convert, Dhunjibhoy Nowrojee, was guilty of a breach of the Ten Commandments, and taunted him with not having performed miracles in support of his new creed, as the sixteenth chapter of the book of Mark led one to expect. It quoted a burlesque on the Lord's Prayer by Voltaire. Very significantly, the book also quoted Voltaire's claim that some miracles in the Roman Catholic tradition had led to the worship of idols.

7. The growth of moderate reform opinion.

This last section will look briefly at some examples of moderate social reform opinion amongst the western-educated. Its growth was shaped both by the worldview of missionary Christianity, and its presentation as a series of ascending truths that linked perceptions of the natural world to a description of the divine nature that seemed to transcend all particular religious doctrines, and by the influence of radical religious ideas, that provided reformers with arguments against the acceptance of Christian beliefs themselves. As examples of social and religious reform opinion, we will look at the newspapers started by the prominent reformer and professor of mathematics and astronomy at Elphinstone College, Balasastri Jambhekar, at the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha, the 'Society for the Spread of Useful Knowledge', founded in 1848 by a group of reformers and students at Elphinstone College, and at

the theistic society, the Paramahansa Mandali, founded by Dadoba Pandurang, who succeeded Jambhekar in Bombay as the Director of the Normal Class, and whose membership in Bombay was largely drawn from students of the Elphinstone College, the Free Church Institution and the Robert Money School. This will both illustrate the origins and very wide currency of reform ideas, and provide a contrast to Phule's employment of these ideas to construct a more radical worldview.

Moderate social reformers shared, then, an acceptance of many of the basic elements of the religious and scientific worldview associated with the Raj, and saw in their application to Indian society the main hope for its social enlightenment and its material happiness. Missionary propaganda formed the most self-conscious and determined articulation of this worldview, and was responsible for transforming this inherent conflict of values into a highly public and normatively charged contest of religious rectitude and social legitimacy. Amongst social reformers themselves, there was, of course, a very wide spectrum of opinion about the precise direction that social and religious change should take. What they did share in common, however, was precisely the public hostility to some of the central practices and beliefs of traditional Hinduism, that was to prove so damaging to its public credibility and to its means of asserting its own legitimacy before the attacks of radicals like Phule. They reflected, in a slightly different form, most of the concerns and attitudes which we have already seen presented as the ideological framework of Christian belief. They were concerned to

convey, what they saw as the material and human advantages enjoyed by western societies, to India, and were convinced that Hindu society had suffered from a gradual decline towards the material and spiritual poverty of the present. In their prescriptions for social and religious renewal, reformers identified themselves with subjective as opposed to ascriptive values, with all that this implied for the hierarchies of Hindu society, the privileges of Brahmans and the devaluation of women and the lower castes. They felt that the most valuable kind of knowledge was that which was useful to man in his worldly life, and that this kind of knowledge should be available to every individual through the creation of a channel of intellectual intercourse which all men shared in common. Implicit in all their writings was the idea of the present good of the community as the paramount social value which was asserted against prescription as the traditional means of conferring legitimacy on social and religious hierarchies. Reformers assumed the concern of every informed individual in the discussion of these questions of public concern.

In their religious ideas, moderate reformers usually accepted some variant on the basic idea of a Supreme Being, the Creator of the universe who existed quite separate from the material world, who had created man to occupy a special moral sphere, and equipped him with reason so that he might understand his material world and exploit it for his support and comfort, a Creator who intended all his human creatures to enjoy the fruits of creation equally. This fitted

both the ideological framework of mid-nineteenth century Christianity, and the conceptions of the divine advanced by European religious radicals. While the latter pointed to the idea of a universal deity and a religion valid for all men, that transcended all particular religious doctrines, the very resemblance between deist ideas of the divine and the basic notion of a single Creator put forward as the framework of Christian belief made it seem possible that the secular truths and material benefits hitherto associated with Christian societies, might be equally well, if not better, enjoyed with a more universal monotheism.

Bal Sastri Jambhekar was born in 1810 in Ratnagiri into a Brahman family. In 1825, he went to Bombay and lodged with Bapusaheb Chatre, an early British inspector of schools and translator of Sanskrit, who taught many of the first generation of social reformers in Bombay in the 1820's.[67] His career was a short but spectacular one. As Secretary of the Bombay Educational Society at the age of 17, he translated Lord Brougham's Treatise on the Objects, Advantages and Pleasures of Science into Marathi. Shortly afterwards, he was made Native Secretary to the Oriental Translation Committee of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bombay, where he worked with John Wilson and the Oriental scholar Colonel Vans Kennedy. In 1831, he began publication of western India's first Anglo-Vernacular weekly, the Darpan. On the establishment of the

67. I have taken my information about Bal Sastri Jambhekar. from The Memoirs and Writings of Acaraya Bal Sastri Jambhekar, 1812-1846, ed. G.G. Jambhekar, Pune 1950, Volume 1, Chapter 1. (English/Marathi)

Elphinstone College in 1834, he was made an assistant professor in mathematics, and Head of the College School when it was founded in 1838.[68] At the creation of the Board of Education in 1840, he was appointed Educational Inspector for the Southern Division, and a full professor in Elphinstone College, teaching mathematics and astronomy, and working out a set of terms for the new concepts that these introduced. He translated English works on a wide variety of subjects into Marathi: history, geography, grammar, mathematics and psychology, and wrote many of his own works on these subjects in Marathi. He was a deeply religious man, especially committed to Maharashtra's bhakti tradition, in 1845 publishing a lithographed edition of the Dnyaneshvari, with critical comments on its internal dating. In his personal life he was a strict vegetarian, always wore the dress of a Pune Brahman, read the sacred books and performed the rite of sandhya each day, and gave daksina to Brahmans.[69] In matters of social reform, he felt that change should be carried out slowly, to preserve the best in the Hindu faith, whilst discarding the corrupt accretions of popular Hinduism. He founded the Native Improvement Society, of which Dadbhai Naoroji was a member. In the

68. For these and other changes in the educational structure of the Bombay Presidency, see A.J. Roberts, op. cit., pp. 72-91 and 100-162.

69. Sandhya is the religious meditation, repetition of mantras and other ceremonies performed in the evening by Brahmans and other twice-born castes. Daksina is a gift of money to a Brahman.

notorious case of Sripat Sheshadri, (the Brahman boy whose re-admission to caste after having shared a house with his elder brother, the prominent convert Narayan Sheshadri, split Brahman opinion in Bombay into two camps,) Jambhekar tried to mitigate the rigidities of Brahman orthodoxy and to have the boy accepted back into caste, and finished having to perform an elaborate ceremony himself at the instigation of the orthodox party. The latter threatened again to boycott him when he tried to explain to them the phenomena of solar and lunar eclipses in the light of European astronomy, and to show how the traditional theories about eclipses should be discarded in favour of the true explanation. Having been made Head of the new Normal Class at the Elphinstone School in Bombay, he died suddenly of fever in May 1846, his death lamented both by British and educated Indian opinion as a severe blow to the progress of reform ideas.[70]

Jambhekar's first paper, the Darpan, launched in 1832, reflected the concerns and attitudes of the first generation of western educated Indians, convinced of the need for an expansion of India's intellectual horizons and for a revaluation of her traditional social and religious beliefs. The Prospectus in the first issue described the intention of the paper 'to open a field for free and public discussion on points connected with the prosperity of this country, and the happiness of its inhabitants'.

70. See, for example, the tributes from the Bombay Courier, the Bombay Times, the Dnyanodaya and the Oriental Christian Christian Spectator, reprinted in G. G. Jambhekar, op. cit., Vol. 1. pp. lvii-lviii.

It intended to promote the literature and learning of Europe, especially those parts which promised the greatest advantage to India.[71] Beginning as a fortnightly publication, it was converted into a weekly after only four months, and by the end of the year it had a circulation of 300 copies.[72] Its introductory essay on the advantages of periodical publication, as it pointed out, a phenomenon quite new in Indian society, reflected both the conviction of a social and material advantage enjoyed by western societies, (whose creation in Indian society formed the first duty of an educated man), and the projection of the present welfare of the community as a matter of 'public' concern, and an overriding social value. The press possessed enormous power to bring about renewal in Indian society, both in 'chasing away the mists of error and ignorance which clouded men's minds, and shedding over them the light of knowledge, in which the people of Europe have advanced so far before the other nations of the world', and in creating 'a channel of intellectual intercourse' which would keep Indians informed about events in different parts of the world, and stimulate the intellectual curiosity, essential for any real improvement in Indian society.[73]

The Darpan's argument that human intellectual effort should be directed above all to the discovery of useful knowledge reflected the idea of man's control over his environment through the use of his practical reason, and the notion of linear human progress to an

71. Darpan, (English/Marathi), 6 January 1832.

72. G.G. Jambhekar, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. xvi.

73. Darpan, 6 January, 1832.

absolute understanding of the moral and material world, in which some societies would be left behind because of their inadequate grasp of these truths. Indian society had always cultivated the arts and sciences, but had regarded knowledge 'as useful only in religion, or as a means of gaining victory in argument, and in no way connected with the common purposes of life'. The changes of the last twenty years made it imperative that Indians should recognise that much of their ancient learning had lost its value, and that they should turn instead 'to bestow their attention on the use ful arts and sciences; their practical application to the common purposes of life; and in short, to gain every acquisition which has rendered European nations superior to Asiatics, and from the want of which their country has so much suffered'.[74]

Some traditional practices received heavy criticism. Indian nautches not only corrupted public morals and made prostitutes of the girls who took part in them, but violated every proper religious feeling: 'With Mussulmans and Parsees, as well as with Hindoos, Nautches are considered necessary, wherever the expense can be afforded, to the celebration of rites most solemn; and with Hindoos, even those which are accounted most sacred are profaned and mixed up with such exhibitions'.[75] The Darpan rejoiced at the suppression of thagi, which it described as common murder, and expressed its horror at the practice of female infanticide in Malwa.[76]

74. Darpan, 24 August 1832.

75. ibid., 14 September 1832.

76. ibid., 27 March 1835.

In 1840, the Darpan ceased publication, and Jambhekar brought out the Dig Darsan to replace it. Entirely in Marathi, it was much more concerned with the spread of practical and general knowledge. It published essays and articles on geography, history, natural philosophy, chemistry and natural science. It lasted for four years, and was replaced in 1845 with the much more successful Prabhakar, which Jambhekar edited with the reformer Bhau Mahajan.[77]

For the next decade the Prabhakar formed the main mouthpiece for the expression of reformist opinion in western India. It reflected the range of concerns with which we are already familiar: the hostility to ascriptive values in the hierarchies of caste, the privileges of Brahmans and the devaluation of women and the lower castes, the adoption of a severely 'rational' attitude to traditional religious beliefs, the conviction of a unique and beneficent deity who had created a special moral sphere for man's existence, and the belief that the decline of Indian society from its former pre-eminence could be reversed only by the pursuit of the material and social benefits that evidently accompanied the social and scientific worldview of European societies. A very strong pointer to the immense impact of the worldview of mid-nineteenth century western science and religion, and its self-conscious articulation in missionary propaganda, was that for the first five years of its existence, the Dnyanodaya newspaper relied to a very large extent upon extracts from the articles and correspondence of

77. G.G. Jambhekar, op. cit., Vol.1, pp. xxxiv-xxxvi. Govind Viththal, or 'Bhau' Mahajan (1815-1890) also sympathised with the aims of the Paramahansa Mandali: see p. 141.

Jambhekar's Prabhakar for its arguments on the necessity of social reform. This is not to say that the Prabhakar tamely reflected missionary criticisms of Indian society and religion. On the contrary, it was the very disjunction between specific Christian doctrines, and the more general worldview of mid-nineteenth century science and religion, for which missionary propaganda acted as a vehicle and a mouthpiece, that allowed reformers to detach the general ideological conceptions from specific Christian beliefs, and to apply these in the cause of India's moral and material improvement.

Much of the character of the Prabhakar was provided by the prominent social reformer Gopal Hari Desmukh, the 'Lokahitavadi', who published in it his cycle of a hundred letters dealing with topics of social reform during the late 1840's.[78] His main concern lay in the decline of India's traditional prosperity and intellectual pre-eminence through its thoughtless identification over the centuries with ascriptive values, a tendency encouraged by Brahmans who saw that they had much to gain through the hereditary conferment of religious privileges. Many of his letters were concerned with the social effects of a commitment to ascriptive values in stifling individual enterprise and merit, with the decline of social leadership in Indian society and the need for a social order which would more accurately reflect individual effort. One of his letters published in the Prabhakar of 11 June 1848, and reprinted in the

78. For an account of Gopal Hari Desmukh's career and ideas, see V.K. Kshire, Lokahitavadi's Thought: A Critical Study, University of Pune, 1977.

Dnyanodaya, on the character of present-day Brahmans, represented a good example of his ideas. It was clear from the writings of Valmik and Vyas that Brahmans of those days could come from any caste, their promotion being the result of individual virtue, so that they possessed talent and discipline:

> 'From this, it is clear that the Brahmans of those days were learned and intelligent, unlike the stupid Brahmans of the present, and there was not the rigid prohibition against mixing outside the caste or against the strict letter of the sastras. Instead, they continually re-thought their ideas, and if they saw that a particular custom had evil results, they would have no hesitation in discontinuing it'.

The contrast with the present day was depressing:

> 'But now, these sorts of prohibitions have been in operation for two thousand years. The people have become blind and stopped thinking for themselves. The sort of Brahman who studied the sciences, or who withdrew to the wilds to meditate, is no more to be seen. Now, some of our Brahmans have become rich; others spend their time in pursuit of good food given for nothing, or waiting to see who will give out daksina. Although they know the Vedas off by heart, they are the enemies of its true meaning. I hesitate to call them learned at all, because a man who just repeats the words without understanding the meaning is of no more value than an animal making noises to itself'. 79

His view of the search for religious merit in the performance of feats of ascetic self-denial reflected this rejection of ascriptive values, and of the traditional Hindu attitude towards worldly existence. God had intended men to live comfortably and happily in the world, and gave them their bodies to be human, not to live in the jungle like animals:

79. Prabhakar (Marathi) 11 June 1848, reprinted in Dnyanodaya, 15 June 1848.

> 'If anyone says that it is useless to labour, to feed and clothe ourselves and support our families, and that God takes no pleasure in these things, let us make it clear that these opinions are against the nature of God and contrary to man's reason'.

It was much better for a man to devote himself to his worldly life rather than performing useless acts of asceticism:

> 'because if God had had it in mind to make man into a being like a wild animal, without the power of reason, then he would have created him in the form of a tiger or some other wild animal, and set him to live in the wilds. But he did not create him like this, so it is better to act like a human being, using our reason, and to marry and raise a family, to work for their support, and to help the poor'. 80

Quite apart from Gopal Hari Deshmukh's substantial contributions, the Prabhakar carried in every issue a large number of articles and letters that reflected the concerns and attitudes typical of the early social reformers. It was particularly vehement about some traditional religious practices, that violated both man's reason and his proper notions of social justice. A letter of 8 August 1848, from 'an enemy of hypocrisy' inveighed against the exploitation of credulous Hindus by professional confidence tricksters who pretended to enjoy special favour with local gods, or pretended possession by supernatural powers, in order to extract money from devotees. The letter urged readers to 'consider how the Hindoo religion is derided and brought into contempt through means of these imposters'. 81

80. Prabhakar, 13 August 1848, reprinted in Dnyanodaya, 15 August 1848.

81. Prabhakar, 8 August 1847, reprinted in Dnyanodaya, 1 September 1847.

The Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha was founded in 1848 by a group of reformers and students at Elphinstone College. Its members included some of the most prominent social reformers of the 1840's. Daboba Pandurang was its first president, Mahadev Govind Sastri its secretary, and Narayan Dinanathji and Laksman Narasinha Josi its committee members.[82] Its statement of intention reflected the desire of early reformers that 'the faults and shortcomings of the people of this country should be brought to light'.[83] The idea of the decline and corruption of ancient Hindu society through the influence of ascriptive values formed a basic assumption of the society. The society also published a newspaper, the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak, and in a long essay entitled 'The past, present and future state of this country', it set out the causes of this decline. Under the influence of a corrupted religious orthodoxy, religious merit was reduced to the mere performance of external observances, divisions grew up between men as rigid as those between men and animals, Brahmans arrogated to themselves the position of gods on earth, and passed their privileges on to

82. For an account of the career and ideas of the social reformer and religious radical Dadoba Pandurang, see A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, Bombay 1947, (Marathi), and by the same author, The Autobiography of Dadoba Pandurang, ed. A.K. Priolkar, Bombay 1973. (Marathi).

83. Marathi Dnyan Prasarak (Marathi) April 1850.

their descendants as a matter of course, regardless of their individual worth. After centuries of such abuse,

> 'our political power has been destroyed, our wealth has gone, our institutions have decayed, our trade is worth nothing, our ancient learning has been ruined, the incentive for individual education has disappeared, ignorance has increased, our once glorious cities have vanished and our peasantry impoverished'.

Only at the onset of British rule, with its vastly superior social values and material achievements, did Indians begin to awake to the true moral and material poverty of their position. The essay finished with a eulogy to these values and achievements, from the innovations of the British legal system to the invention of the watch and the steam engine.[84]

The Marathi Dnyan Prasarak portrayed man's spiritual condition and his position in material creation in terms essentially similar to those set out as the ideological framework of Christian belief. In the first lecture presented to the Sabha, and published in April 1850, man was presented as a different order of being from animals, endowed by God with reason so that he could understand his environment and use it for his support. This was the importance of knowledge to man; it represented his key to every kind of social and material happiness that his Creator intended him to enjoy. Western societies had brought the state of human knowledge to a perfection unprecedented in human history, and it was India's task to shake off her own inertia and join in the application of this

84. Marathi Dnyan Prasarak (Marathi), July 1850

knowledge to her own social structure and religious beliefs.[85] The miracles of western scientific knowledge formed a constant source of comment, and articles frequently pointed out how these could be useful to Hindus in the control of their everyday environment. One long article explained how a knowledge of the properties of oxygen and carbon dioxide could prevent a frequent cause of death from asphyxiation during the repair of very deep wells.[86]

Moreover, knowledge was not merely a means to material comfort, but allowed man to perceive his real moral condition, and his relation with his fellow men and with God. Here, the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak strongly echoed mid-nineteenth century Christianity's belief of the ultimate unity of all truth, social, scientific and religious. An article of December 1850 exhorted readers to carry out their pursuit of knowledge diligently, and they would advance their understanding of the wonders of God's universe, and be led to put their faith in him and his laws. They would be brought to see that the very purity of God's nature implied a code of conduct for man's everyday life, in the avoidance of all lying, cheating, stealing and sensual indulgence, and in the pursuit of the social harmony in which God intended all men to live.[87]

The Paramahansa Mandali, the 'Society of the Supreme being'[88] was a secret society founded in Bombay at about the same time as the

85. Marathi Dnyan Prasarak.(Marathi),April 1850.

86. ibid., December 1855.

87. ibid., December 1850.

88. The term Paramahansa is both one of the names of God, and a term for an ascetic who has subdued his senses by meditation.

Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha.[89] As he did in the latter, the reformer Dadoba Pandurang took a leading part in its foundation, while he was Director of the Normal Class at Elphinstone College. He recruited members for both groups from amongst the students of the College, so that their membership frequently overlapped.[90] The Paramahansa Mandali formed the counterpart, in religious ideas, of the reform attitudes expressed in the Marathi Dnyan Prasarak Sabha. Its account of the relations between God and Man reflected the parallelism between the ideological framework of Christian

89. A.K. Priolkar argues that the most likely date for the founding of the Paramahansa Mandali would be 1849, after the return of Dadoba Pandurang from Surat. A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, p. 251.

90. This coincidence in the membership of the two societies seems to have been regarded by the orthodox in Bombay as a typical example of the way in which western education undermined the religious beliefs of young Hindus. The Dnyanodaya of 15 March 1852 records that a Hindu Sabha had been formed in Bombay after leading Hindus in the city started to learn about the opinions of the young English-educated students of the Paramahansa Mandali, that caste should be abolished and drastic changes introduced in conventional religious beliefs, and, more worryingly still, that the apparently respectable leaders of the Dnyan Prasarak Sabha in Elphinstone College were all members of this secret society. The Dnyanodaya also refers to an attack in print on the Paramahansa Mandali by one Ramakrsna Anant Josi, entitled A celebration of the opinions of the Paramahansas (Marathi) which argued that the members of the Mandali were shortly to become Christians like Sripat Sheshadri. This in turn was refuted by the reformer Bhau Mahajan in the Prabhakar of 14 March 1852, who argued that if the defenders of Hindu beliefs disagreed with the reformers, they should argue out their differences rationally, rather than making scurrilous attacks that caricatured their position and beliefs.

belief conveyed in missionary propaganda, and the ideas of European radicals. The Mandali tried to arrive at an idea of the Creator, and of the religious duties ordained for man, that would transcend all particular religious confessions, and reflect the universality of the Supreme Being, and the real unity of all men as his creation. Such a universal monotheism offered the answer to Hinduism's problems of spiritual decay and material backwardness. The idea of the individual in society that it offered would free man's energies from their stultification by the ascriptive values of popular Hinduism. At the same time, it seemed even more compatible with the secular truths and material benefits associated with western societies and amplified in missionary propaganda, than the particularist doctrines of Christianity. Following this external stimulus to re-examine the beliefs and social consequences of contemporary popular Hinduism, the Paramahansa Mandali was in its later form, as the Prarthana Samaj, the 'Prayer Society', to turn back to the ideas of monotheism to be found within the Hindu tradition.[91]

The origins of the Paramahansa Mandali tell us much about the formation of its opinion. After teaching at the Elphinstone College, Dadoba Pandurang went in 1841 to Surat, to help found the new English School. There, two influences were important. He became friendly with two sastris, Nirbhayaramsastri and Yadnesvarsastri, and learned Sanskrit. He read the ancient Hindu texts, and saw that

91. For a short account of the Prarthana Samaj, see J. Masselos, Towards Nationalism: Group affiliations and the politics of public associations in nineteenth century. Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 81-85, and M. Lederle, Philosophical Trends in Modern Maharashtra, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1976, pp. 80-85.

these diverged widely from current practices, especially in the latter's uncritical regard for Brahmans. Secondly, in Surat he shared a house with Henry Green, the Headmaster of the English School. Green was an agnostic, who discussed with Dadoba the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Christian religion.[92] Dadoba became convinced that there was some truth about man's relations with God in every religion, and that if it were possible to take these elements of truth, and discard the local and the particular aspects, then all men might enjoy the spiritual and temporal advantages of a true, universal religion, without the shortcomings of the revealed religions that sowed such discord among men at present. With Durgaram Mancharam, a master at the Gujurati school in Surat, and two others, Dinamanishankar and Dalpatram Bhagubhai, Dadoba established in Surat the Manavadharma Sabha, the 'Society for human religion'.[93]

The rules of this society were:

1. There is one God of all the world.
2. Mankind is all of the same caste.
3. Mankind's religion is one, and it is only his pride which makes him think that his religion differs from others.
4. Amongst men, who is great and who is inferior is decided by virtue, and not by birth.
5. Men should act according to their reason.
6. Men should worship God, and this is an obligation.
7. All men should inform others of the lessons of the path of virtue. 94.

92. A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, p. 242.

93. ibid., p. 243.

94. ibid., p. 244.

The members of the Manavadharma Sabha kept its existence a secret. One of their activities was to conduct a campaign in Surat against belief in magic and the power of mantras and magical incantations, in 1845. They published a challenge to anyone who wanted to come forward and prove that he could perform acts of magic. Their challenge was taken up by one Vijayarambuva, who tried to perform feats of magic in front of a large crowd, and failed. The infuriated crowd, composed, according to the Dnyanodaya, who reported the incident, of 'Ouditch Brahmans', then turned on the reformers, and they were forced to seek refuge in Dadoba's house.[95]

In 1846, Dadoba returned to Bombay to take up the post of Director of the Normal Class, and became friendly with Ramacandra Balakrsna Jayakar. Jayakar had been Headmaster of the Government High Schools in Ratnagiri and Thana, and in 1849 he left the Education Department for the post of Assistant Commissioner in the Customs Department.[96] It is probable that the Mandali was started at that time, with Jayakar its first president and Dadoba Pandurang providing the ideas and forms of worship.[97]

95. A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, p. 248.

96. ibid., pp. 250-251.

97. Dadoba Pandurang, however, never actually became a member of the Paramahansa Mandali, despite contributing so much to its ideas. Baba Padmanji records that Dadoba Pandurang and Bhau Mahajan were of the Mandali's opinions, but never came to its meetings. They sat in another room, and met the other members afterwards. But Dadoba's brother Atmaram not only came to meetings, but held them in his own house. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, p. 178.

Like the Manavadharma Sabha, the Paramahansa Mandali was kept a closely guarded secret by its members, so that direct evidence about its beliefs and practices is hard to find. The best account is in Baba Padmanji's Arunodaya. Padmanji had himself been a member before his conversion, and the book also contains copies of letters written to Padmanji from fellow converts who had also belonged to the Mandali, in answer to Padmanji's requests for information about it. Padmanji described his own introduction to the society, after two or three of his friends found that he was willing to break caste. They took him to a meeting, where there were a large number of people of different castes; he said that he felt happy to see that so many others felt like him. He learned that the society believed that caste divisions and idol worship were wrong, and that the remarriage of widows should be allowed; they had not yet decided what the rest of their opinions were to be. The society was to be kept a secret until there were over a thousand members. New members had to agree to the rules, and to take bread and milk from the same vessels as the other members. At the beginning and end, Marathi prayers by Dadoba Pandurang were read.[98]

The Mandali never produced a definitive text expounding its beliefs. However, Padmanji mentioned that, on hearing that he was considering conversion to Christianity, a friend gave him a handwritten book setting out the Mandali's opinions in an organised way, and that this book was later published in 1868 and after the demise

98. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, pp. 173-182.

of the Mandali, as 'A discussion on religion'.[99] A.K. Priolkar has argued convincingly that this book, which was subtitled 'A few discriminating thoughts on religion and social institutions, chiefly of the Indian Aryas, by a cosmopolitan Arya', was actually written by Dadoba himself, and represented an amplification of the rules of the earlier Manavadharma Sabha.[100] The propositions set out at the beginning of the book certainly support this argument, and can therefore be seen as the nearest we can get to a systematic statement of the Mandali's views:

1. God is one, and he alone is to be worshipped.
2. Religion consists in worshipping God with love and through moral conduct.
3. The religion of mankind is one.
4. Every individual has an independent right to consider for himself.
5. Daily and Occasional religious ceremonies should be consistent with human reason.
6. The whole of human kind is one caste.
7. Every human being is to be brought up and instructed in useful knowledge. 101

Branches of the Mandali were formed in Pune, Satara, Ahmadnagar, Belgaum and Ratnagiri. R.G. Bhandarkar, who had been a member, described the spread of the Mandali's opinions to the provincial towns in the Deccan and Konkan, and the way in which he came to accept its views. The students of Dadoba's Normal Class

99. Having seen the book in its manuscript form, Baba Padmanji wrote a refutation of its arguments against revealed religion, in a work published in 1858, called An Examination of the Claims of Deism. (Marathi).

100. A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, pp. 245-248.

101. A discussion on religion: a few discriminating thoughts on religion and social institutions, chiefly of the Indian Aryas. By a cosmopolitan Arya. Bombay 1868, (Marathi) This list forms the table of contents of the book, which was dedicated to the Prarthana Samaj. A copy of this is available in the India Office Library and Records.

> 'passed their exams and became teachers themselves, and wherever they went into the towns outside, they spread the opinions and practices of the Paramahansa Mandali. One of these students was a master at Ratnagiri. I was there until 1852. This master gave to many students the precepts of the Paramahansa Mandali. A friend of mine accepted the Mandali's opinions, and tried to turn me in that direction. When we went for long walks in the evenings, we talked about the evils of caste distinctions, how much damage was done by this division between high and low, and how true progress for this country could never be achieved without removing these distinctions. I agreed with all these opinions, but at that time I did not become a member. In 1853, I was working at the Elphinstone Institute, and became a member of the Paramahansa Mandali at sixteen years of age. 102.

The reformer Kesav Sivaram Bhavalakar, who was also a student at the Elphinstone Institute at this time, recorded how Dadoba actually planned the future teaching careers of his students around the spread of the Mandali's opinions, asking Kesav to go to Pune to teach in the government Marathi school, as then he would be able to spread the Mandali's opinions in the most important cultural centre of the Deccan. 103

Baba Padmanji recieved a very full description of the Ahmadnagar branch of the Mandali from Kasam Mahamadji, who later became a Christian. The account suggests strong differences of opinion in the Mandali. At first, Mahamadji recorded, there were just fifteen or twenty members in the branch. Many were students of the government English school who had lost their faith in their own religion through the progress of English knowledge. There was no definitive book of rules, but members thought that they should not observe

102. R.G. Bhandarkar, Speech to the Second Conference of the Aryan Brotherhood, quoted in A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, pp. 251-253.

103. K.S.Bhavalkar, Autobiography. A copy of this work, of which the title page is missing, is in the Jayakar Library, University of Pune.

caste, should not worship idols, should permit widow remarriage, should educate women, and should spread education amongst the lower castes. They did not accept the atheistic opinions urged on them by some reformists in Pune and Bombay; they thought that there was a single Creator, the author of the universe, who had sent no particular religious text to man, since human understanding sufficed to tell man of all his duties. Every week, some members went to a secluded place outside the town to pray. They took an English Christian prayer book, omitting Christ's name and some other matters that seemed particular to the Christian religion. But the leaders of the Nagar branch refused to join them for this.[104]

This suggestion of disagreement is confirmed elsewhere: in Padmanji's account of his reading a paper before the atheist group from Pune, and in a letter written to Padmanji by Narayan Raghunath, a member of the Bombay branch at the same time as Padmanji, who recalled in detail the arguments that had taken place about the necessity of a divine revelation.[105] In the end, Padmanji and Narayan Raghunath had left the Mandali over this issue, and with some other members had set up the Satyashodhak Sabha, the 'Truth-seeking society'. This group came much closer to a definite adoption of the Bible as divine revelation, and some of its members converted soon afterwards.[106] It is possible to guess at the existence of other disagree-

104. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, pp. 362-365.

105. ibid., pp. 409-411.

106. This term 'Satyashodhak', 'Truth-Seeking' was eventually to be used by Phule himself in 1873, in his first attempt to set up a permanent institution for fight for the cause of the lower castes, the Satyashodhak Samaj. See pp. 309-321.

ments within the Mandali. While on the one hand, Dadoba Pandurang and Bhau Mahajan were not prepared to go so far in their personal breaking of caste as to take part in the actual meetings of the Bombay Branch, other members were very much more radical. They carried bread openly in the streets to their meeting place at Jayakar's house in Belgaum. Prior to using this as a meeting place, they had rented a house in the Khattravadi area of Bombay. The owner of the house locked them out after he heard of their activities, fearing trouble. So the members broke back into the house, and desecrated the idols of the house, throwing them down into a corner.[107] These disagreements reflected the peculiar ideological position of the society. On the one hand, its radical deist ideas tended to take on an almost anti-religious tone, especially in the hands of young students. On the other, the society was based on the very idea of the religious as the foundation on which a new social order might be constructed.

The date of the Mandali's demise is uncertain. It suffered a severe blow in 1860, when its membership list was stolen, and the fear of exposure was thought to have brought all activity to a halt.[108] Yet G.N. Madgaonkar's description of Bombay written in 1863

107. This information is contained in a letter about the Paramahansa Mandali, published in the Indu Prakash, (English/Marathi), 11 May 1885, and signed 'A Political Rishi'.

108. A.K. Priolkar, Dadoba Pandurang, p. 259. Priolkar argues that the list of members was stolen not by a Hindu zealot who wanted to publish it, since this was never done, but by one of the members who regretted joining and wished to destroy the evidence of his having done so.

asserted that members of the Mandali were still active.[109] In his obituary on Dadoba Pandurang's death in 1882, Baba Padmanji traced the demise of the Mandali to the decision by some members to form another society in which they would be quite open about their beliefs. The first meeting of the Prarthana Samaj was held at the house of Atmaram Pandurang on 30 December 1866, and included some of the members of the Mandali; Durgaram Mancharam and the Prabhu reformer, Moroba Vinoba.[110] although not Dadoba Pandurang.[111] However, the formation of the Prarthana Samaj also reflected an ideological shift, away from the covert but uncompromising religious and social radicalism of the Mandali. While maintaining the idea of a universal kingdom of God, the Samaj observed the basic social rules of Hindu society, hoping that social reform would naturally follow progress in religious ideas. The Samaj also turned to western India's own religious traditions, notably the bhakti saints of Maharashtra, and searched for a synthesis rather than a complete rejection of traditional religious ideas.

109. G.N. Madgaonkar, A description of Bombay, Bombay 1863, (Marathi), p.344.

110. Moroba Vinoba was a social reformer of the Candraseniya Kayastha Prabhu caste, active in the cause of widow remarriage in the 1860's.

111. Dnyanodaya, 26 October 1882.

Chapter Five.

Student radicals in mid-nineteenth century western India: Phule's early career

1. Introduction.

The last chapter described the broader processes of religious change and cultural conflict at work in mid-nineteenth century western India. This chapter will look at the concrete forms that these processes took in Phule's immediate social and intellectual environment, Pune in the 1840's and early 1850's, and will describe the influences and activities that shaped his early experience.

Two features of this environment stand out. The first is the heterogeneity of the institutions, individuals and other points of contact through which Phule and his colleagues received new ideas. While mission schools and newspapers were the most important single influence in creating the distinctive consensus of opinion shared by Phule and his friends, government schools, individual British administrators and the new vernacular press appear also as important agents of change in the personal lives of individual reformers. This would be consistent with the argument advanced in the previous chapter: that it was neither the systematic criticism of traditional Hindu society articulated in missionary propaganda, nor the ideas of European religious radicals alone which shaped the intellectual development of Hindu radicals and reformers, but their simultaneous reinforcement and counterbalancing of each other.

The second striking feature of the early experience of Phule and his colleagues is the function of the schools and colleges that

they attended, and of their peer groups in them, in the assimilation by the individual of ideas of social reform and religious radicalism. It would be easy to assume that the mixing together of different social groups, the weakening of the traditional social ties of family and their replacement by the bond of a common activity and occupation, the higher levels of literacy, the greater awareness of new ideas and new challenges to traditional beliefs, and the increased opportunities for individual mobility through the provision of employment, that shaped the early experience of young radicals like Phule, were specifically the product of an urban environment. This was not quite the case. It was rather at the level of the school and the college that these changes took place, and it is possible to see the same processes at work in the case of reformers who lived in small provincial towns altogether lacking the relative individual mobility or intellectual intensity of larger centres like Bombay or Pune, when these individuals attended a government or missionary school. Here, the peer group emerges as a vital part of the process by which new ideas were assimilated. Most changes in religious attitudes by young Hindus were not made in isolation, but as part of discussion groups among friends and classmates, impromptu societies set up in colleges for the debate of new ideas or semi-secret associations of like-minded students set up to carry the new ideas into action by a violation of caste rules. As a set of young students and scholars all subject to the same very strong influences, the peer group enforced a temporary intellectual uniformity on its members. In most of the examples for which we have evidence traditional attitudes were uprooted not by direct contact with the sources of new ideas, but by the ideas themselves being passed on by fellow students and pressed upon the individual with the encouragement

and support of his fellows. This focus on the specific institutional environment within which new ideas were received helps to explain the dynamics of Phule's own circle of friends and fellow-students: their close agreement during their school years and co-operation in projects of reform afterwards in the late 1840's, followed by the development of disagreements and withdrawal from joint projects as the school environment was replaced by new and divergent occupations and experiences.

Phule has left no direct account of his early career. Much of the information that we have derives from early biographies that are very difficult to document. [1] Besides Phule's own experience, therefore, we will also look at those of three others who shared a common education and who have left very detailed accounts of its effects on their intellectual development. Two of these were his colleagues and friends: Baba Padmanji, educated at mission schools in Belgaum and Bombay and later a convert to Christianity, and Moro Viththal Valavekar, educated at the Scottish mission school in Pune at the same time as Phule and a co-worker in the schools for the education of girls and the low castes. The third, Krsnarava Ratnaji Sangle, a Sali by caste, and educated at the American mission school in Ahmadnagar, was not a friend or colleague of Phule's, but provides a useful contrast to the examples of young reformers educated in the larger urban centres.

1. The first and most detailed biography is P.S. Patil, The Life of Mahatma Phule, Cikhali 1927, (Marathi)

2. Scottish mission schools in Pune and Bombay.

Some indication has already been given of the nature of Scottish missionary strategies and attitudes, and in particular their combativeness in the face of traditional institutions and beliefs.[2] These attitudes set the tone of the schools in Pune and Bombay. The report of the Annual Examination of the mission English Institution at Pune in 1850 set out the mission's policy: 'Whilst we endeavour to afford them the best literary and scientific education, we give them also a thorough Christian training, at least as far as our means of doing so extend. They have the truth constantly placed before them and urged upon their acceptance'.[3] The sciences featured largely in the curriculum. The Natural Sciences, Botany and Ethnology were taught, including 'the varieties and dispersion of the human race', and Physiology, including 'the Organs and Functions of Animal Life'.[4] As a matter of course for their teachers, these subjects presented the natural world, devoid of divine or magical significance, as available for human analysis and understanding. This, on the other hand, appeared as a startlingly new and incontrovertible truth for the young Hindu student, turning upsidedown beliefs he had always accepted without question, and leaving him at a loss in the activities that were founded on those beliefs. Significantly, the textbook for Natural Philosophy was Whewell's Bridgewater Treatises, with their strong underlying belief that

2. See pp. 81-86.

3. Report of the Annual Examination of the Mission English Institution at Pune, 1850, printed in the Poona Observer, 30 October 1850. National Library of Scotland, MSS Vol.8976 f.8.

4. idem.

religious and scientific truth were coterminous, and that the beauty and harmony of creation was testimony to the overwhelming power and benevolence of the Creator.[5] In theology, subjects taught were the sinful state of man and its remedy, and the nature of the Saviour and the proof of his divinity.

Some of the missionaries' own comments reveal the intense emphasis on the propagation of Christian truth. Murray Mitchell, who taught both in Pune and Bombay during the 1840's and early 1850's, described how 'The doctrines and duties of our holy faith are fully illustrated to all the pupils, and the Bible is made a class book, as soon as they can read it intelligibly. The duties of the day are now regularly commenced with prayer to God'.[6] A feature of missionary activity of great importance in the intellectual development of young radicals was the informal discussion groups held after school hours with the more interested and promising boys. Mitchell reported of his students: 'I still continue to meet with them on an evening once a week for the study of natural history, which seems to interest them, and affords many opportunities for pointing out to them the glorious attributes of the Deity'.[7] Arguments against the social and

5. Report of the Annual Examination of the Mission English Institution at Pune, 1850, printed in the Poona Observer, 30 October 1850. National Library of Scotland, MSS Vol. 8976. f.8. The curriculum also included mathematics with geometry, trigonometry and logarithms, English literature, Logic and 'Easy Lessons on Reasoning', and a general geography of the world.

6. Murray Mitchell to the Reverend Dr. Brunton, Convenor of the Scottish General Assembly's Convention on Missions, Edinburgh. Pune, 26 December 1838. N.L.S. MSS.Vol. 7531, f.196v.

7. Murray Mitchell to Brunton, Pune 31 October 1938. N.L.S. MSS Vol. 7531, f.187.

ritual distinctions of caste, based on the observable physiological similarities between men everywhere and the intentions of their Creator that this revealed, later formed a standard tactic in debate for radicals like Phule, and it is very likely that discussion groups like these were one source of the ideas behind them. Mitchell even held informal meetings for the boys of the Government English School in Pune, to compensate for what he saw as their lack of proper religious instruction:

> 'I have commenced by discoursing to them on the nature and operations of the human mind. It is my purpose, God willing, after giving them a short and as interesting a view as I can of this important subject, to lead them on to the proper use of their powers in the investigations of both moral and physical truth. I will, of course, as soon as circumstances permit, introduce to their notice the study of the evidences of our Holy Faith'. [8]

This policy was not without effect on the boys: 'So far from objecting to read the Bible, they seem to delight in it above all other books, and peruse it at their spare time as well as in school'. [9]

Another important aspect of the Scottish mission schools was their determination to admit boys of untouchable castes like any other, if they could fulfil the entry requirements, and the missionaries regarded it as a crucial part of their public stand against Brahmanic religious values. This provoked quite frequent conflict with Brahman students. A collision of this sort occurred in 1842, over the admission of a Mahar boy. Mitchell described how:

> 'No sooner had he taken his seat in the class to which he was appointed, than the boys in it objected to his so doing, and were joined by the Brahmans in the other classes. They were told that their complaint could not be regarded; that

8. Murray Mitchell to Brunton, Pune 31 October 1838. N.L.S. MSS Vol. 7531, ff. 187-187v.

9. ibid., f. 187.

> the school was open to everyone who chose to attend; that they might as well object to the presence of Christians and Musulmans'. [10]

This free intermingling of castes previously kept isolated from each other, the indiscriminate availability of education, and the atmosphere of hostility to conventional religious hierarchies, were to have a lasting effect on Phule and others of his circle who attended the schools.

3. Phule's education.

According to his first biographer, Phule attended a small village school just outside Pune between 1834 and 1838, when he would have been between seven and eleven years old. [11] There is a story, repeated by all his biographers, but very difficult to document, that a Brahman clerk in his father's produce shop persuaded Govindrao to withdraw the boy from the school and put him to work tending the crops. The motive given in the story is the Brahman's fear that the young boy might become skilled enough in writing and accounts for his father to be able to dispense with the services of a clerk. [12] In 1841, the biographies record that a learned Muslim, Guffar Beg Munshi, a teacher of Urdu and Persian, and a friendly British administrator, Mr. Leggit, persuaded Govindrao to send the fourteen year-old boy back to school, which he did in 1841, sending him to one of the Scottish mission

10. Murray Mitchell to Brunton, Pune 31 December 1842. N.L.S. MSS vol. 7532 (1) ff. 197-197v.

11. P.S.Patil, op. cit., p. 16.

12. idem. The story is also found in Dhananjay Keer, Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution, Bombay.1974, pp.11-12.

schools run by Murray Mitchell.[13] He remained here until 1847, and left having completed his secondary education in English. At this school, he met two of the Brahman friends who were to work with him on the low caste schools project: Sadasiv Ballal Govande, son of a poor Brahman family and three years older than Phule,[15] and Moro Viththal Valavekar, also a poor Brahman boy, who, like Phule, was later employed as a teacher at the Scottish mission school.[16]

The first direct comments on the development of Phule's ideas refer to the year 1847, when the twenty-year old Phule and his friends are said to have been fired with ideas of liberating their country from foreign rule by their reading of the lives of Sivaji and George Washington and of the work of Thomas Paine, and by the influence of anti-British Brahmans.[17] The young students took lessons in

13. A source confirming that it was actually Murray Mitchell's school that Phule attended is a letter from Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to P.S. Patil, in reply to his request for biographical information about Phule. Pinjan says that Phule always said that he had received his English education at the mission school run by Murray Mitchell in Phadake's vada in Pune. T.H. Pinjan to P.S. Patil, Cincavad, 6 February 1928, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

14. D. Keer and S.G. Malshe give 1847 as the date that Phule left the school. P.S. Patil says that he left school at the age of 21, having read as far as the 'seventh book' in English. P.S. Patil, op. cit., p. 19.

15. P.S. Patil, op. cit., p. 18. At the school also was Sakharam Paranjape, also later active in the schools project.

16. The information in this section about Moro Viththal Valavekar is taken from his MSS autobiography, published in the journal Parag (Marathi), February and March 1849, edited by C.G. Karve.

17. D. Keer, op. cit., p. 14. Phule's own work on Sivaji, and his admiration for Paine's ideas would seem to confirm this: see pp. 235-244 and 269-276. Govande later wrote a Marathi biography of George Washington, published in 1892.

dandapatta, a style of fencing with staves, from Lahujibuva Mang, who later taught the leader of the revolt against British rule in 1879, Vasudev Balavant Phadake.[18] As Dhananjay Keer has argued, this was a period of frequent conflict with the new rulers in Maharashtra: Umaji Naik and his Ramosi followers in 1826, the Koli rebellion in 1830, the deposition of Pratapsinh of Satara in 1839, the revolts of Bhau Khare, Chimnaji Jadhav and Nana Darbare in the name of the deposed peshwa between 1839 and 1846, and Bapu and Raghoji Bhangre in 1848. It is possible that the example of some of these may have inspired the young Phule.[19] Phule himself tells us that in his youth he had practiced dandapatta and firing with guns because he hoped to help in the overturning of British rule, a desire which he attributed to the bad counsel of a group of Brahmans in Pune.[20] There is also a story, very difficult to document, that he assaulted two British soldiers during the same period whom he felt had insulted him.[21]

There is a suggestion that the following year, 1848, was very much a turning point in the young Phule's intellectual development. This was the year in which he read Thomas Paine's work, to which he was introduced, he says, by the same Brahmans who tried to persuade him and his friends of the necessity of all castes uniting to win back control of their own political affairs. Having been introduced to Paine's work, he made a closer study of the books for himself, and realised their potential for radicalism of a very different kind.[22]

18. P.S. Patil, op. cit., p. 19.

19. D. Keer, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

20. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 135.

21. D. Keer, op. cit., p. 15.

22. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 135.

There is another story, which Phule's biographers date to the same year, and which they argue to have had a profound effect on him. He had been invited in 1848 to the marriage party of a Brahman friend. Whilst walking along with the marriage procession, at which he was one of the very few non-Brahmans present, he was recognised as a Mali and a Sudra and roughly rebuked for daring to take part in a Brahman ceremony. He returned home, deeply shaken, to question his father about the traditional social values that lay behind the incident. His father advised him that the relative degree of social liberty enjoyed by the lower castes was a very recent phenomenon, and recounted the punishments that such a social misdemeanour would have incurred under peshwa rule. He also described the more general social disabilities then inflicted on the lower castes and untouchables, and advised his son not to take such risks again. [23] If this story has a basis in fact, it has almost certainly been embroidered, both by Phule himself and his biographers. However, an incident of that kind would not be inconsistent with what we know of Phule's intellectual

23. D. Keer, op. cit., pp. 17-20; P.S.Patil, op. cit., pp. 20-24. This theme of the sufferings of untouchables specifically under the last peshwa Bajirao II recurs frequently in the arguments of low caste and untouchable activists in this period. See, for example, the letter from the ex-untouchable Christian convert who had visited Phule's school in 1855, giving a long list of the torments inflicted on Mangs under peshwa rule; how they had to keep a pot tied around their waists to spit in so that they did not pollute the road, how there had been no well at all for Mangs anywhere in Pune, so they had to rely on other castes to get water for them; how, if there was a theft or robbery in the village, the Mangs would be punished for it without any proper enquiry; and how boundary disputes between villages were decided by their each sending out a party of Mahars and Mangs to fight each other. Obviously a highly emotive subject, the issue of their treatment under peshwa rule had become a folk memory by the mid-nineteenth century, that provided a powerful source of social radicalism. This letter is in Dnyanodaya (English/Marathi) 15 March 1855.

development during the year. We do know that it was in 1848 that he visited the American mission school for low caste girls in Ahmadnagar, and following its example, opened the first of his schools for girls in Pune in the same year.[24] This would suggest a definite shift of emphasis away from hostility to the British, towards a concern with social problems seen as the consequence of social and religious practices badly in need of reform. For the incident itself to have taken place would also be quite in keeping with our knowledge of Phule's experience. It may have been that Phule's period at Murray Mitchell's school had accustomed him to a much greater degree of social freedom and indifference to caste divisions than he was likely to find consistently in Pune society at large. His first independent experiences in the latter as a young adult almost certainly resulted in clashes of which this incident could have been an example.

We also have some evidence of Phule's religious position during this period. This seems to have been formed by the combination of Christian missionary propaganda and European religious radicalism already described in Chapter Four. Krsnarav Arjun Keluskar, a recruit to the Satyashodhak Samaj and personal friend of Phule's during the 1880's, gave his account of Phule's early religious attitudes in a

24. A girls' boarding school had been established in 1838 by the American missionaries at Ahmadnagar, that had 100 girls in it, mainly Christian, by 1846. William Hazen, A Century in India: a Historical Sketch of the Marathi Mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1813-1913, Bombay 1913, p.34. The school was run by Cynthia Farrar, the first single woman to go to Ahmadnagar, who arrived in December 1827, with the explicit aim of establishing schools for girls. See Charlotte Dennett Staelin, The influence of missions on women's education in India: the American Marathi Mission in Ahmadnagar, 1830-1930. University of Michigan Ph.D. thesis, 1977. Phule's visit to Ahmadnagar is recorded in a statement made on Phule's behalf at the public examination of one of the low caste schools, printed in the Dnyanodaya, 15 December 1853.

letter to his first biographer: 'Many educated people at that time thought that the Christian religion was better than their own religion, and some people even became Christians themselves. But Jotiba and his friends did not become Christians. The reason for this was that they had obtained one or two books from a very great revealer of the truth from America. This man was Thomas Paine'. Phule and his friends, Valavekar and Vasudev Babaji Navarange 'learned these books off by heart'. Thomas Paine's The Age of Reason exercised a particular influence:

> 'In The Age of Reason, the evidence for the falseness of Christianity is made clear. And it was simply that its priests were making frantic efforts to give arguments in support of it. This was what Thomas Paine showed. He said that God is one, and in understanding his existence the Bible is worthless, and that there is never any need for an intermediary in order to worship him. So Jotirao and his friends saw that the Christian religion was without justification'. [25]

Phule' friendship with Vasudev Babaji Navarange, an early example of the kind of mixing of ideological with business interests that so often characterised the membership of the Satyashodhak Samaj later in the century, is further testimony to his deist religious position, and further, to a possible link with the Paramahansa Mandali. The links between Phule and Navarange were close. Navarange had been the publisher of the first edition of Tukaram Tatya Padaval's Jatibhed Vivekasar, in 1861, while Phule had been the second.[26] Navarange went to London in 1863 to make contacts for the sale of metal

25. K.A. Keluskar to P.S. Patil, Bombay, 24 April 1930, P.S. Patil MSS, unpaginated, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

26. D. Keer, op. cit., p. 93.

casting equipment, and made Phule his agent in Pune, to his great financial benefit.[27] It was Navarange who published the Paramahansa text ascribed to Dadoba Pandurang, Dharmavivecana, in 1868.[28] In 1869, Navarange undertook to sell copies of Phule's A Ballad of Sivaji at his shop in Bombay.[29] Another indication from the 1860's of earlier links between Phule and the Pune branch of the Paramahansa Mandali is the dedication of the Sivaji ballad to Ramacandra Balakrsna Jayakar, the president of the Mandali, 'as a Mark of Profound Respect and a Testimony of Sincere Affection'.[30]

4. The experience of friends and contemporaries.

Phule's childhood friend and colleague, Moro Viththal Valavekar has left a very valuable account of his own and his friends' religious attitudes while they were at school, that almost certainly included the young Phule, and that confirms the description given by K.A. Keluskar. The ideas that Valavekar describes point to the strong influence both of Christian missionary propaganda, and of the idea of a natural and universal religion, basic to human nature everywhere, that was clearly the product of European religious radical arguments.

27. K.A. Keluskar to P.S. Patil, Bombay, 24 April 1930, P.S.Patil MSS, unpaginated, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

28. His name appears on the title page as publisher.

29. The book is advertised on the title page as available from Navarange's shop in Kalabadevi road in Bombay. Navarange later became a member of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj and of the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay. He married a Brahman widow and was thrown out of caste. Dnyanodaya, 15 October, 1870.

30. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, Bombay 1869 (Marathi). D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p.4.

Valavekar recalls that he had found most striking in the missionary teaching the urge to reform Hindu society and to do good to his countrymen. But Christian beliefs had been unacceptable as an absolute system of values:

> 'Even while I was a student, my implicit faith in Hindu dharma left me, and my mind turned towards the Christian religion, and I even thought that it would be right to become a Christian. But I thought that in accepting a new religion, you should decide by comparing it to the old religion. In this way, while making my study of the Christian religion, it appeared that, like our own religion, there were some things that had to be taken on faith'. [31]

This led him and his friends to a position very close to that of the radicals in the Paramahansa Mandali: 'So we circle of friends who were studying the Christian religion decided that, just as there are differences of opinion on many things, and people cannot agree on them, so it was not possible to say about any religion that in very truth it had been given by God'.[32] In some points, the principles of all religions were the same: 'The fundamental precepts of all religions are the same, and we know what these are from our basic powers of distinguishing between right and wrong. Because this natural religion is met with everywhere, it must be true'.[33] This decided Valavekar and his friends upon a position that identified itself with no specific religious confession:

> 'The essence of this was that there was one God, and we should worship him; and we should conduct our behaviour according to the moral principles that are respected everywhere. The main

31. Parag, February 1949, p.26.

32. idem.

33. idem.

> truth was that doing good to others was virtue, and harming others was sin. Having decided on these general religious principles, we did not act further on our plan to become Christians'. 34.

What is interesting in Baba Padmanji's account of the development of his religious attitudes is his description of the progressive stages by which he lost his faith in traditional Hinduism. He had received his early education at the High School of the London Missionary Society in Belgaum.[35] In 1848, at the age of 18, he went to the Institution of the Free Church of Scotland in Bombay. He gives us a detailed account of his religious ideas at that time. The only religion he knew was puranic. He knew nothing of the Vedas or Vedanic beliefs. His beliefs were catholic, covering a wide assortment of Hindu gods, drawn both from local traditions, such as Khandoba, and from all-India accounts such as the figure of Rama. He believed in the magical powers of mantras, bhuts or evil spirits, in the idea of muhurts or auspicious moments based on the movements of the planets and in magical omens. He did not think of religions as true or false, but regarded the Hindu religion as that of his ancestors and his caste, and felt that all religions were true for those that worshipped them. He believed gods really inhabited the stone idols that he worshipped with his family. He thought that Brahmans, saints, gurus and sanyasis were all to be venerated for their holiness, and that virtue

34. Parag, February 1949, p.26. Moro Viththal Valavekar later edited the Indu Prakash (English/Marathi) and Native Opinion (English/Marathi) newspapers, and was a founder member of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj and editor of the Subodh Patrika (Marathi). K.A. Keluskar records Valavekar, as editor of the Subodh Patrika, telling him to prepare a translation of the Age of Reason and The Rights of Man by Thomas Paine. K.A. Keluskar to P.S. Patil, Bombay, 24 April 1930. P.S. Patil MSS, unpaginated, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

35. For earlier references to Baba Padmanji, See Chapter Four, pp. 114-118 and 137-141.

was to be derived from their blessing, rather than from the individual's conduct.[36]

After six months at the Institution, he was thinking in terms of a single Creator of all existing things, 'Sri Jagadguru', whose defining principle was his opposition to all forms of impurity.[37] Having lost his belief in all forms of magic, Padmanji came across the evidence against idol worship, and found it convincing.[38] For some time after losing his faith in these aspects of conventional religion, he retained his belief in the Vedas, believing them to be given by God. He did not know what was in them, but he understood from what people said that they were not idolatrous. Then he got hold of a copy of H.H. Wilson's translation of the first part of the Rgveda, and saw that it was concerned with celebrating the Sun, the Moon and Indra, and gave no indication of being from God as Padmanji then envisaged him. At the same time, he read an article in the Calcutta Review, reprinted in the Dnyanodaya, which proved conclusively that the Vedas could be dated historically just like any other human artefact. He read the other translations of the Vedas as they came into India from Europe, and

36. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, Bombay 1888, (Marathi) pp. 127-142.

37. ibid., pp. 146-148.

38. ibid., pp. 372-375.

so felt the last pillar of his faith in Hinduism disappear.[39]

Padmanji's circle of friends were very important during every stage of this loss of faith. He described their sense of joint excitement and adventure when, full of hope for the reform of Hindu society, they studied the accounts of Martin Luther and the Reformation in Europe: 'We felt as though we ourselves were living in Luther's time, and suffered his pains and rejoiced at his victories: and were inspired ourselves by his struggle against the Pope'.[40] It was Padmanji's discussion circle in the college who persuaded him to join the Paramahansa Mandali,[41] and when he left it, convinced that God had given man a specific revelation, it was with college friends that he set up the small Satyashodhak Sabha. The Sabha met every Sunday, said prayers and had a discussion about religion, and read the Bible and other religious texts.[42]

Padmanji's explanation of the broader decline of faith in these areas of Maharashtrian society, given in a letter to the Dhumaketu newspaper outlining the causes of his own conversion in 1854, attributed it to the new education available under British rule. Interestingly, however he argued that it was not merely the

39. Baba Padmanji, Arunodaya, Bombay 1888, (Marathi) pp.196-198. Padmanji later wrote the Marathi tract What is in the Veda for the Bombay Tract and Book Society, which was first published in 1880. This clearly reflected Padmanji's own experiences with the Vedas, in that he hoped that other Hindus, discovering their contents for the first time, might feel a similar weakening of their beliefs.

40. Baba Padmanji, op. cit., p.156.

41. ibid., pp. 173-175.

42. ibid., p. 196.

education of the missionaries, but that in the government schools also, citing the Paramahansa Mandali as an example.[43] Padmanji's conviction reflects the essential heterogeneity of the influences affecting religious change in the mid-century.

Krsnarav Ratnaji Sangle has left a remarkably detailed account of his religious experiences, which also give us an insight into the kinds of conflicts and pressures that might have affected Phule.[44] Sangle, born about 1840, into a Sali or weaver caste family of moderate means in Ahmadnagar, first attended the American mission school in the town, and then the government English School.[45] Like Valavekar and Padmanji, Sangle's first dissatisfaction with conventional religion arose during his participation in a small discussion group at school. A Sali friend, Laksmanravaji Mahatekar, who was at the government Marathi School, invited him to a gathering of students there, and he attended regularly thereafter to discuss the Christian religion. They were joined by a Brahman, Vasudev Daji Kukade, and another Sali, Savalaramaji Navaji Satapute, and they formed their own society for debate. There was a similar discussion group amongst the boys in the first English class, who were older than they were.[46]

43. Baba Padmanji, op. cit. p. 367.

44. This unpublished manuscript is in the possession of Sri Bhaskarrao Jadhav of Sadhu Vasavani Road, Pune. It is unpaginated. References here are to the titles of the different sections into which the MSS is divided.

45. No precise date of birth is given in the MSS. However, Sangle records that he was aged about 20 when he was baptised in 1860, and this would make his birth date 1840, or thereabouts.

46. MSS chapter entitled 'The first beginnings of my turning away from Hinduism'.

Significantly, Sangle's loss of faith followed a course very similar to that descrived by Padmanji. He broke caste in secret by eating bread and milk with his reformist student friends. At the same time, he lost his belief in the worship of idols: he described how, as the youngest male in the family, it fell to him to wash and anoint the family's numerous gods, and how all he could feel in this duty was distaste at the smell of the carefully-preserved Ganges water that was kept for this purpose. He felt convinced that it was wrong to worship either a principle of nature or a part of it in the form of stone or metal images. He and his friends agreed that belief in bhuts, devil and spirit possession, and in the holding of festivals on holy days and of pilgrimages to sacred rivers, was founded simply in popular ignorance.[47] This breakdown in belief was followed by a long period of secret visits with his friends to the bungalow of one of the missionaries, in a search for religious truth. Some of the stories he related from this period reveal a strong anti-Brahman feeling. At the funeral of his brother, who had been bitten by a rabid dog, he refused in front of the gathered family to drink the tirth of the Brahman officiating at the ceremony, explaining to his distressed mother that it was no dishonour to refuse to drink water made dirty by the Brahman's foot.[48] When giving the Brahman his daksina, the priest demanded that the money should first be soaked in the holy water, since unsoaked money would burn his hand.

47. MSS chapter entitled 'I shun the worship of idols'.

48. Tirth is water made holy by a Brahman's dipping a toe of the right foot into it.

So, Sangle argued, 'in doing these kinds of things, the deceitful Brahmans mislead the people'.[49]

Sangle's explanation of his final decision to convert to Christianity in 1860 strongly recalled missionary arguments about the proper role of a religious text in the life of the individual believer, representing a set of unspoken assumptions to which Hindu apologists never addressed themselves. Sangle attributed his decision to the fact that no Hindu could describe accurately what his religion was, because of the countless texts, gods and traditions that it possessed, its assimilation of Muslim ideas along with a primitive belief in different forms of magic.[50] Sangle clearly felt the need for a text and a clear set of beliefs which would guide him in his everyday conduct.

5. Low caste education and the emergence of an individual radicalism.

In 1848, Phule and his student colleagues turned to the reform of traditional Hindu society as the most important single issue for the socially concerned, with education as the key to a fundamental change in social attitudes. After visiting the Female schools belonging to the American mission in Ahmadnagar in 1848, Phule returned to Pune and opened a low caste female school, taking on the task of

49. MSS chapter entitled 'The death of Namadev'. Namadev was Sangle's brother.

50. MSS chapter entitled 'Our religion is Hindu - but should we call it Hindu, or pure Arya?'.

teaching himself.[51] The project was beset with difficulties: Phule's father turned him and his wife, Savitribai, out of the house when he refused to give up the scheme; it was so difficult to find female teachers for the schools that Savitribai herself took on the task, having been first coached herself by the social reformer and member of the Paramahansa Mandali, Kesav Sivaram Bhavalakar;[52] the scheme was chronically short of money, relying on labour and contributions from Phule and his friends, and the charity of individual European administrators;[53] and it was often difficult to persuade the lower castes of the value of education for their children. Despite these problems, and with a grant of Rs.75 a month from the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, several more schools were founded in Pune in the next four years.

The arguments for female and low caste education given by Phule and his colleagues reflect strongly the view of India as a society materially and intellectually impoverished, that was articulated most strongly in missionary propaganda. In 1852, the Board of Education recommended to the Bombay government that some mark of honour be conferred upon Phule for his labours in the cause of

51. I am not here giving all the details of the schools administered by Phule and the Managing Committee set up in 1853. An account of the details of their operation is in a Report of the Female Schools in Poona from the Educational Inspector, Deccan Division. Bombay Public Consultations, General Department, 12 April 1856, No. 670 of 1856.

52. Bombay Guardian, 28 November 1851, quoted in D. Keer, op. cit., p. 28.

53. In a meeting held in September 1853, Phule and his colleagues voted their thanks to a very wide variety of sources for their support: to the Board of Education, the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, Mr. Rivers, Mr. Fairbank, Mr. Farrar, Gopal Hari Desmukh, Vamanrao Janardan Ranade, the Dnyanprakash (Marathi) and the Vartamandipika (Marathi) newspapers. Reported in the Dnyanodaya, 15 July 1855.

education, and as a result Phule was presented with a pair of shawls in a public ceremony by Major Thomas Candy, the principal of Pune College.[54] He replied thanking the government for the honour:

> 'What I may have done towards furthering the cause of educating native females is indeed too little and falls far short even of the demands of duty as one of the sons of the beloved land. It is to your benevolent and philanthropic desires to create a noble and generous ambition among the youths of this country and to see India raise her now abject head and occupy a place among the civilised nations of the earth that I owe these honours'.[55]

The failure to educate women in particular was seen as the prime cause of India's decline. The Marathi Address at the Second Annual Examination of the female schools in Pune on 12 February 1853 castigated traditional attitudes towards women in these terms:

> 'In their opinion, women should forever be kept in obedience, should not be given any knowledge, should not be well educated, should not know about religion, should not mix with men, and they bring out extracts from our sastras in which women are so deprecated in support of these idiotic beliefs, and ask whether anything written by the great and learned sages be untrue'.[56]

In 1853, Phule fell ill and was unable to continue the work of teaching himself, so he formed his colleagues into the 'Society for

54. The presentation was reported in the Bombay Guardian, 26 November 1852. It was reported to have caused displeasure amongst the Pune conservatives; 'It appears that many of the old school Brahmans are displeased that a presentation of shawls should have been made to a Sudra (Joti Govind Rao is a gardener by caste, although not by occupation); the Brahmans maintain that a man of his rank should receive the lower reward of money'.

55. Jotirao Phule to Viscount Falkland, 22 November 1852, Bombay Public Consultations, General Department, 22-31 December 1852, No. 10053 of 1852.

56. Reported in the Dnyanodaya, 1 April 1853. In the same address the Committee thanked Mr. Lumsden of the Judicial Department, and another British official, who visited the first female school and donated Rs.100, and another European, Mr. Brown, who gave Rs.100 to the school to buy prizes for the girls.

increasing education amongst Mahars, Mangs and others'. Sadasiv Ballal Govande was its president, Valavekar its secretary, Sakharam Yasavant Paranjape, another school friend, its treasurer, and Phule a member of the committee.[57] The Society opened two more schools for untouchables, and gave lectures to the Mahars and Mangs of Pune explaining the benefits of education. As in the arguments advanced earlier when Phule led the project, the Committee emphasised the general backwardness of Hindu society as the cause of the sufferings of the lower castes, rather than attributing these to any particular social group. In a letter to the Bombay government asking for money to build a proper school house and for land to build it on, Valavekar explained the miserable condition of the lower castes, 'sunk deep in ignorance and misery, arising from want of education and intercourse with society in general, as the rest of the castes of Natives have excluded them from these benefits'.[58] The Committee even felt that the idleness of Mahars and Mangs was partly to blame for their condition.[59]

At this point in the affairs of the Committee, it is possible to see the first signs of the emergence of Phule's own distinctive form of radicalism. There is evidence that he took issue with other members of the Committee over the extent to which Brahmans as a caste might be held responsible both for the condition of the low castes,

57. Reported in the Dnyanodaya, 15 September 1853.

58. Moro Viththal Valavekar to Viscount Falkland, 16 December 1853, Bombay Public Consultations, General Department, 13-30 September 1854, Nos. 5411 to 5417 of 1854.

59. Report of the formation of the 'Society for increasing education amongst Mahars, Mangs and others', printed in the Dnyanodaya, 15 July 1855.

and for the backwardness of Hindu society more generally, Phule arguing this to be the case, and the Committee attributing these more to a social system that was upheld by all clean castes. In Slavery Phule referred to a quarrel that had arisen between them, and gave his version of its causes:

> 'When in that school I began to reveal to the pupils the lies in the cunning books of the Brahmans' ancestors, misunderstandings came into our conversation and behaviour with each other. The meaning of what they said was this, that the children of untouchables should not be educated. If perhaps it was necessary to educate them, then they should just be taught the basics of reading. I thought, on the other hand, that they should be given a thorough education, and get from it the power to distinguish between good and bad'. [60]

The reason for the Committee's attitude, he felt, was their fear, as Brahmans, that if the untouchables were educated 'they would remember the tyrannies practiced by the ancestors of the Brahmans, and they would despise them for it'. This ended their co-operation in running the schools: 'When the division between us occurred, I understood their devious plans, and withdrew myself from both projects'. [61]

This is certainly an account highly coloured by Phule's own prejudices. But there is evidence that the extent of Brahman

60. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 141. There is also a hint of a rift between Phule and one of his Brahman colleagues that developed after the latter left the project, and which concerned the actual observance of the social conventions concerning purity and pollution. In Slavery, Phule tells a story about a Brahman gentleman who had worked with him, and who had come in a few times to teach the untouchable children, without any scruple about polluting himself, 'but when that same Bhatji took a job in an eating house, he became so obsessed with ritual purity that he threw out a poor Sonar because he had slaked his thirst in the hot sun by drinking from the well at the school.' D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 144

61. ibid., p. 141.

responsibility for the ills of Hindu society was the issue over which they quarrelled, and that Phule was taking an increasingly extreme stand on this. An article in the Dnyanprakash newspaper praised Phule for his efforts in education, and said that it believed that the higher castes, under the influence of Brahmans, had been responsible for the deprivation of low castes. But the article said that Phule was mistaken in representing Brahmans as being the sole cause of the problem.[62]

Some correspondence in the Dnyanodaya of this period also gives us a very valuable insight into the development of Phule's ideas, and in particular into the tone of the teaching that the Committee found hard to accept. In February 1855, the paper published a letter from a Christian convert who had recently visited one of the schools for untouchables in Pune. There, Phule had got a 14 year-old Mang girl to read out an essay to the visitor, who said that the essay clearly demonstrated the fruits of Phule's hard labour for the untouchables. The girl had studied with Phule for three years, and her essay was long and ferocious in its condemnation of Brahmans. She described in minute detail the sufferings of the untouchables under the Brahman government of the peshwas, as she had heard it from her parents own lips. In particular, she singled out the elitism of Brahmanic religious values: these constituted 'a religion that one person alone can enjoy, while the rest of mankind looks on with hungry faces'. Their motives were not hard to find:

62. Dnyanprakash, 5 December 1853, referred to in D. Keer, op. cit., p. 69.

> 'The people who dress themselves up and parade round in their purity have only one intention, and that is to think that they are more pure than other people, and they feel happy at this; but do their cruel hearts ever feel any pity at the suffering that we endure that the very touch of our hands pollutes them?'

Even reformist Brahmans were not spared. One of the fruits of a proper education - and here this is almost certainly the 'thorough education' that Phule spoke of - was that it enabled the low caste individual to realise that 'those who have been educated in pure schools, and who are called reformed, and who are so clever, but who from time to time commit deeds so evil they would make your hair stand on end - it is these who are the real Mangs and Mahars'.[63]

Having quarrelled with his colleagues sometime in 1853, Phule took a job as a part-time teacher in 1854 in the Scottish mission's school for female boarders in the mission compound. His recruitment was reported:

> 'We have been happy in securing the aid in their instruction (for nearly four hours a day) one of the most zealous and accomplished teachers in Pune - Jotee Govind Rao Phoolay - a Native Philanthropist, whose persevering efforts in behalf of the education of females and the low castes have called forth the warmest commendation of the Board of Education and of Government itself. He has fulfilled our highest expectations; the progress of the girls has been most satisfactory'.[64]

It is also clear that Phule had maintained his contact with the Scottish missionaries over the period since he had left school, and that he had used the mission facilities in the course of his own educational work. Murray Mitchell recorded an incident in the mission English school, similar to the disturbance that he had

63. Dnyanodaya, 15 February and 1 March 1855.

64. Oriental Christian Spectator, February 1855.

reported in 1842, in which Phule had had a hand:

> 'My worthy friend, Jotiba Govindrao Phooley, a remarkable man who has laboured hard to benefit the Mhars - who are of the lowest caste, or rather of no caste at all - one day sent a Mhar boy to us. He was found sufficiently acquainted with the vernacular to allow us to receive him into the lowest English class'. [65]

Murray Mitchell described how the Brahmans in the school had objected en masse to the presence of the Mahar boy, threatening to desert the school if he were not removed. Murray Mitchell was saved from his dilemma by the Mahar boy himself, who never came back to the school after the protest.

65. Murray Mitchell, In Western India: Recollections of My Early Missionary Life. Edinburgh 1899, pp. 314-315.

Chapter Six.

Christianity and the attack on caste in Phule's early writing.

1. Introduction: 'The Third Eye'.

Phule did not intend his distinctive focus upon Brahmans and Brahmanic religion as the ultimate cause of the deprivations of the lower castes to remain a matter of private disagreement between himself and his colleagues, who felt that these sufferings were the product of a social system supported by all but untouchable castes, whose own backwardness was a part of the problem. In 1855, setting a pattern that he was to follow throughout his life, he described his position in detail in a polemical tract, a play entitled 'The Third Eye'.[1]

With its subject the exploitation of an ignorant and superstitious peasant couple by a cunning Brahman priest until their enlightenment by a Christian missionary, the play clearly set out the argument that Hindu religion represented both an ideological imposition upon the lower castes, and, in its insistence on ritual and ceremony, a cause of their material impoverishment. At the same

1. No copies of this play were thought to have survived until 1979, when three manuscript copies were found in the papers of P.S. Patil. These papers are now in the library of Sivaji University, Kolhapur. All references here to the text of the play are taken from the first published edition, in the journal Purogami Satyashodhak, (Marathi), Vol 5, 2, April-June 1979.

time, Phule made this issue much wider and more overtly political by relating it to some of the social effects of British rule. He was concerned in particular with the use of education and the skills of literacy as a vital social resource that conferred great power on the Brahman social groups who formed by far the largest proportion of those in the new vernacular and government English schools, and in the new administrative, educational, judicial and revenue institutions of the Raj.[2] Phule felt that this virtual monopoly of the strategic position of administrative intermediaries between the British government and the masses of Hindu society represented a formidable extension of their traditional prerogatives over certain occupations and skills, and the religious authority on which this was based. Their common social, occupational and religious experience conferred, moreover, a unity of interest upon Brahman social groups, which made it likely that they would act to support each other in spheres far removed from the religious. Where Phule differed from his colleagues, and where he drew together religious and political relationships within western Indian society to form his own distinctive brand of anti-clericalism, was to regard Hindu religion as the worldview of specifically Brahman social groups, a worldview that served Brahman interests both in matters of religious authority, and in the secular spheres of administrative power, occupational competition and the ability itself to comprehend the realities of political relationships within society. Although other castes might accept it, Brahmanic religion could represent for them only a false consciousness and an unknowing servitude to the interests

2. See Chapter 1, pp. 17-18.

of Brahmans themselves.

The title of the play, Tratiy Ratna, 'The Third Eye' has a double allusion. The first is probably to the third eye of Siva in the centre of his forehead, whose use implies great anger and fury.[3] The second is almost certainly to the description by the social reformer Gopal Hari Desmukh, of the new kinds of education available since the introduction of East India Company rule, as endowing those who received it with a 'third eye', with new modes of perception and new ideas and information with which to understand Indian society.[4] Phule attempted to get the work published by sending it to the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, which had just been instituted for the encouragement of Marathi language and literature.[5] However, the Committee rejected the play, and so it was not

3. Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary gives the phrase tratiy netra ughadane, literally 'to open the third eye' as referring to the third eye of Siva in the centre of his forehead, and translates it as 'to flash forth fury; to be in a high rage'. It is possible that Phule also intended to reflect this meaning, since the work is written as a passionate protest.

4. See the introduction to the first published edition by S. Raykar, in Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p.6. Tratiy Ratna means 'the third jewel'. However, one copy of the manuscript play was called 'Tratiy Netra', 'The Third Eye', and it is probably that this was the meaning that Phule intended to convey.

5. For Elphinstone's reform of the traditional institution of daksina, money which had been paid to learned Brahmans under the peshwa's government, see R. Kumar, Western India in the Nineteenth Century, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1968, pp. 48-49.

published.[6]

In the form in which it was published in 1979, the play is 38 pages in length. Its cast consists of a Brahman priest, a poor cultivator and his wife, a Christian missionary, and a commentator who seems to represent Phule's own view. The plot of the play is fairly simple. The Brahman priest visits the pregnant wife of the cultivator as she sits alone at home. He tells her that an unfortunate conjunction of the zodiac threatens the life of her unborn child. In order to avert the danger, she and her husband will have to perform certain ceremonies of propitiation, as well as give a feast to a large number of Brahmans. By this and similar devices, he extracts grain and money from the couple. The character of the priest as Phule portrays him is not a pleasant one. He treats his patron the cultivator with the utmost contempt, playing on his ignorance and fear, in his own greed for money and good food. The cultivator and his wife accept their lot with resignation, and regard the payments to the Brahman to protect their family as their karma. Already

6. Phule tells us in his short book Slavery that he submitted the play to the Daksina Prize Fund Committee, but that the preponderance of Brahmans on the Committee resulted in its rejection, so that it was not published. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe p. 139. I have not been able to find out whether the play was ever actually performed. The fact that three copies had been made suggests that the text was actually passed around amongst Phule's circle. An internal reference on page 24 of the play suggests that Phule hoped that it would be staged: the commentator urges the audience 'if you should read or listen to this debate' to take heed of his warning of the treachery of Brahmans. It may be that Phule hoped to convey his message to an illiterate audience by staging the work as a play.

poverty-stricken, they resort to the money-lender to pay for the feasts and ceremonies. After the feast, at which the Brahmans keep the cultivator and his wife waiting in the hot sun and spare them only a few left-overs, the pair happen to hear a Christian missionary preaching by the road-side, and begin a discussion with him. The missionary convinces the cultivator that God was not to be found in a stone idol such as he had just thrown himself into debt to propitiate, nor were divine powers to be found vested in any particular social group. Instead, the missionary points to the true God as the Creator of the earth and all existing things, who stood firmly detached both from the social order and from objects in the natural world. The cultivator's anger grows as he realises that the Brahman has deceived and robbed him in the name of non-existent gods and planetary forces, and sees that generations of poor and ignorant men like himself have been exploited in the same way. By means of the commentator in the play, Phule argues that this age-old injustice is not the result merely of the greed of individual Brahmans, but resembled more a deliberate conspiracy, in which generations of Brahmans had been involved, to maintain the fiction of Brahmanic religious authority enshrined in the sacred books of the Hindus and given the additional force of custom. They owed their success to the denial of any form of literacy or learning to the Sudras and ati-Sudras, the untouchable castes. The play concludes with the cultivator and his wife thanking the missionary for having exposed the hollowness of all Brahman pretensions, and resolving to educate themselves at Phule's own night school, since in education and know-

ledge lay the key to a true understanding of their own society, of events in the world, and of the real natures of God and men.

2. Religious attitudes, social resources and social control.

As the guardians and major beneficiaries of traditional Hindu beliefs and institutions, Phule held Brahmans in large part responsible for the ignorance of the lower castes and for their deference to a religious authority without foundation. During the exchanges between the Brahman and the cultivator, the commentator interjects:

> 'The Brahmans have for a long time impressed upon the minds of the Malis and kunbis, with the display of their writings and powers, that the Sudras should never transgress the orders of the Brahmans, and if any of them thought that this was not true, they were told to go and look at the books of Manu and the deeds of Parasuram, which would confirm them in the proper belief'. 7

The cultivator explains how this control of the skills of literacy had worked in his own village:

> 'All of the Brahmans would secretly give advice to the Malis and kunbis not to send their children to school or would put the fear of the kulkarni into them, so was it not difficult for their children to learn?' 8

He makes no distinction between Brahmans, identifying the Brahman priest serving his own family with previous generations of Brahmans, and remonstrates with the priest: 'Didn't you Brahman people always tell our mothers and fathers that there was no authority for them to learn to write in the laws of Manu, so what could they do?' 9

7. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p. 29.

8. ibid., p. 31. The kulkarni was the village accountant, and always a Brahman.

9. ibid., p. 34.

The effects of Hindu religious attitudes and social regulations on the low castes provides Phule's main point of concern in the play. The traditional and highly conservative ideas of karma and dharma, the ideological underpinning of the social divisions of jati and varna, had retained their central position in the religious worldview of the common man. This had produced the social stagnation clear both in the deference and resignation of the cultivator, and in the Brahman's inability to change his conviction of his own religious superiority. The reality of life for the cultivator is his karma. He reassures the priest, who has refused to help him carry the food for the feast since he is in a state of ritual purity: 'It doesn't matter, Maharaj, this is the fulfilment of my destiny, and I must bear it while there is breath in my body'.[10] His wife defends her husband for failing to address the priest in the proper manner: 'Whatever we do, we are of the kunbi caste; we ought to stay in our place behind the plough'.[11] Neither have they any sense of themselves as individuals, only as links within the great chain of generations. The cultivator wearily agrees to pay for the feast: 'What should I do if I did not agree? What is the point of our domestic life, if it is not for our children?'[12] Phule is sharply aware of the crucial role played in the transmission of traditional culture and religious attitudes by women, shown also in his early

10. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p. 22.

11. ibid., p. 17.

12. ibid., p. 15.

concern for women's education. It is through the cultivator's wife that the priest chooses to work, and she who takes fright and cajoles her husband into doing as the priest asks. Her ignorance of the consequences of debt makes her regard the moneylender as the easy solution, despite her husband's misgivings.[13] The priest and his wife are shown equally constrained by the traditions of their own caste. The priest congratulates his wife for having insisted that they choose the guests for the feast 'because whose wife are you? If we Brahmans weren't born to think up schemes like this, then you could say that we were born for nothing'.[14]

Having described the cultivators' submissiveness to the religious authority of the priest, Phule went on to suggest that as a result of their common position in the religious hierarchy, Brahmans in all walks of life tended to share the same attitudes to the lower castes, and to collaborate with each other to preserve both their traditional prerogatives and the new administrative and occupational advantages that these had brought. Phule feared that the traditional educational disabilities of the low castes would be confirmed and reinforced by the very administrative structures of British rule. He envisaged the formation of a layer of western-educated Brahman officials and administrators, from the village pantoji or schoolteacher, who would traditionally have been a Brahman, but now

13. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p. 18.

14. ibid., p. 23.

controlled the implementation of education schemes at village level, to the inspectors of education in the Department of Public Instruction.[15] The rise of such an administrative elite, not only in the Education Department, but in every area of administration that demanded clerical and professional skills, would convert the benefits of British rule into an unmitigated disaster for the lower castes. Phule regarded western education, with its emphasis on secular and rationalist truths about the external world, as the most potent of weapons for the liberation of the lower castes. In the emergence of a Brahman administrative elite, the latter would add to their traditional methods of social control the appropriation and monopolisation of the most effective means of bringing about a fundamental change in religious values. Not only would such an elite work to hold back the benefits of such an education from the low castes, but their very appropriation of western education as their own administrative and professional style would defuse the revolutionary potential of such an education, and blur the issues more than they would have been had reformers only the intransigently orthodox to deal with.

The cultivator expresses anger and frustration at the way in which Brahman teachers and officials subverted the education of the lower castes in the villages, despite the good work of well-disposed

15. For an account of changes in the administrative structure of education in the Bombay Presidency during this period, and of the social origins of those in the new educational institutions as students, see E.M. Gumperz, English Education and Social Change in late Nineteenth Century Bombay 1858-1898. University of California Ph.D. thesis, 1965, pp. 186-297.

British administrators:

> 'I have heard that our Candy Saheb has prepared many teachers, and sent them from village to village to pass on their learning, but what is the use? All the Brahmans in these villages give secret advice to the kunbis and Malis not to send their children to school'. 16

He tries to correct an illusion which he felt had been created by Brahmans and unwittingly adopted by British administrators: that the low castes had no liking or aptitude for education. The missionary in the play is labouring under this impression, and at first regards the cultivator's illiteracy in this light, until he points out its real cause: the Brahman village schoolteacher's dislike of teaching lower caste children.[17] The cultivator goes on to suggest measures that would counteract this bias:

> 'Through the Government Board of Education a rule should be made that there should be an estimate of the Mali and kunbi population in every village, and that if the villagers did did not allow a certain proportion of their children to fill up the school, then that school should be broken up'. 18

The cultivator also expressed the frustration felt by men like himself when their educational backwardness disqualified them from

16. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op.cit., p. 31. Thomas Candy had a long career - between 1822 and 1876 - in India, most of it in the educational administration of the Bombay Presidency. He was the first Superintendant of the Pune Pathasala or College, then Principal of Deccan College, and finally chief Marathi Translator to Government. G.C. Bhate, History of Modern Marathi Literature 1800-1938, Pune 1939, p.81.

17. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p. 30.

18. ibid., p. 32.

employment in the East India Company's administration:

> 'When the mamledars and other Brahman officials who, having been educated by you English, obtained high offices and swelled up with pride, we saw them, and do you think that we still agreed that we should not be allowed to educate ourselves? No! Always, we used to think that we might be educated and become important officials, but don't you know how the Brahman schoolteachers conspire to prevent us?' 19

The predominance of Brahmans at the lower levels of the administration removed even the opportunity for complaint: 'When will God arrange things so that all we people can go straight to the Sarkar and tell them, without any fear of you Brahmans?' [20] Nevertheless, Phule felt that the introduction of East India Company rule represented a unique opportunity for the lower castes. Education in particular represented the key to a new understanding of society. The cultivator warns the priest: 'When our people have become educated in the English Raj they will begin to understand things, and then they will not let one of you Brahmans carry on'. [21]

Their traditional religious disabilities thus lay at the root of the frustration and backwardness of the low castes under British rule. These inter-connected problems required a radical solution: a revolution in the worldview of the lower caste individual, that would in stripping the Brahman of his religious authority, and the social hierarchies of Hinduism of their religious sanction, free him to understand for himself both the workings of the natural world and the distribution of power and authority in his own society.

19. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op cit., p. 31.

20. ibid., p. 35.

21. ibid., p. 36.

3. Missionary arguments and religious radicalism.

Against the fictitious world of Hindu religion, Phule tried to bring to bear a more powerful set of ideas about the individual and society, the relations between God and man, and the place of the sacred in the natural world. The dual influences traced in Chapter Four are strongly in evidence in Phule's ideas here, as he used Christian missionary arguments to produce a strong rejection of conventional Hindu beliefs, and what were in effect the ideas of European religious radicals, to stop short of accepting Christian or any other revealed religious doctrine in its place.

Phule put forward the notion of the divine as a single and unique being, the Creator of all existing things and the source of moral law for human society. A clear separation was made between sacred or divine forces, and the natural and social worlds. The natural world, bereft of magical significance, was left open to investigation by secular reason in all its empirical, scientific and instrumental forms. While the Creator might intervene in human social affairs as Providence - indeed, the commentator in the play argues that the arrival of the British in India had been arranged by Providence for the relief of the lower castes - the separation between the two removed the religious sanction from the rules governing the hierarchies of Hindu society, and made it clear that they were merely human constructs. The task of re-educating the cultivators is put in the hands of the missionary, who represents not only Christian values, but the concrete presence of an external power that might be persuaded to intervene actively in Indian society on behalf of the lower castes. However, there is never any suggestion that the cultivators are to use these new ideas for anything but their own radical

ends. The missionary points out to the cultivators that the god Maruti, on whose propitiation they have just spent a large sum of money, is made of stone, and so clearly forms a part of the earth. He asks him whether such a great work as the earth could have produced itself, or whether a being other than it must have created it. The cultivators admit that the earth must have been produced by such a Creator, but baulk at the idea that he should be worshipped, since he was not perceptible to the senses. The missionary points out the impossibility of worshipping anything less, such as the Maruti, since all things perceptible to the senses must have been created by the higher being. The cultivators are persuaded, and seeing that the god Maruti is only a stone, explode into anger:

> 'I can see now that this stone is not worthy of worship, and if I smashed it now and ground it into little pieces and mixed it with the earth and made rangoli patterns with it, then perhaps another credulous man like me would not listen to the Brahmans, be deceived in its name and fall headlong into debt'. 22.

The commentator elaborates further on the nature of the Creator, arguing that he will act in human affairs to remedy injustice: 'All you Malis and kunbis, even Mangs and Mahars should not fear the Brahmans for a moment. For this purpose, God has sent the English into your country'. The purpose of this was 'to lift the ban on education which the Brahmans have imposed on the Sudras and

22. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., pp. 28-29. Note the striking similarity of this to the missionary Robert Nesbit's account of his standard method of confronting idol-worshippers, quoted in Chapter Four p.103. Rangoli are patterns made with coloured powders on the ground for decoration, especially on festive occasions.

ati-Sudras, to educate them and make them wise'.[23]

The potential of this ideological shift in the nature and location of the divine power needs hardly be emphasised. It carries the idea that God, as the unique Creator, constitutes the source of justice for human society. The traditional idea of karma had, of course, its own very strong notions of justice.[24] This had a considerable potential strength against attempts at social reform. But Phule set out to undermine the very idea of karma by projecting the Creator as a beneficent being who constituted an impartial court of appeal for essentially present causes. Justice on this view stems from a determinate and just Creator who is outside contemporary social arrangements, rather than consisting in those very social arrangements themselves, as the status of different individuals reflected their conduct in previous existences. In this way, the legitimation, in karma, for social divisions and hierarchies, collapses, and they appear as the mere constructs of self-interest. The world is not simply reduced thereby to conflicts of self-interest; Phule relocates the source of moral order within the beneficent deity, and this time it is a moral order much closer to the Christian one, that regards the present life of the individual as the centre of moral concern, and all individuals as equal before

23. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op.cit., pp. 35-36.

24. Max Weber, indeed regarded the idea of karma in traditional theology as the most complete theodicy ever produced. Max Weber, The Religion of India, Glencoe 1958, p. 21.

their Creator. The idea of dharma was closely tied in with that of karma: unless an individual believed that his present social position, for example, as a tiller of the soil, was part of a logical scheme in which his present life was only a small part, the concept of religious duty as the fixed adherence to this role lost its force.[25]

The idea of a separation between God and the external world potentially undermined conventional Hindu religion in other ways. The dichotomy between pure and impure was fundamental in the construction of the social hierarchies of Hinduism, and was perceived as inherent in the natural and social worlds.[26] By challenging the presence of any such magical properties in the external world, Phule challenged the basis of the social categories on which these rested. This rendered meaningless the intricate structure of ritual signification which convention demanded should be imposed on many actions and social exchanges, and which was in practice the means by which one social group distinguished itself from another, as in the exchange of food.

While Phule found missionary arguments very useful as models for his own critique of orthodox religion, he did not simply advocate conversion. He seems to have felt that it would be premature to lay down a fresh set of fixed ideas about the conduct of religious life. As the cultivator says, 'Until all these pretences have been

25. For a general discussion of ideas of dharma, see Arnold Kunst, 'Use and misuse of dharma' in W.D. O'Flaherty and J. Duncan M. Derrett (eds.) The Concept of Duty in South Asia, Vikas, Delhi 1979, pp 3-17.

26. See Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, London 1970, Chapter 2.

broken down, our people will never be able to recognise properly who is the true God'.[27] This point also refers us back to the discussion groups that Phule's friend Valavekar described.[28] It is very likely that Phule also felt that as a revealed religion, Christianity suffered from some of the same defects as Hinduism.

4. The community of the lower castes.

In place of the traditional social order, Phule did not merely envisage a collection of social atoms. He attempted to use traditional social categories in a new way. The lower caste man or woman who perceived the contradictions in their situation were not thereby isolated, since precisely this process of individual enlightenment served to integrate them into a new collective - that of the oppressed. Throughout the play, Phule summarised the community that he felt suffered a common oppression at the hands of Brahmans as 'Mali-kunbi' and 'Mang-Mahar', and in varna terms as Sudra-ati-Sudra. One of the aims of the play was to convince his audience that the heterogenous collection of social groups that fell within these terms did in fact share common interests and a common social position. This was to be done by the ideological construction of a social grouping that would be both socially credible and attractive, the latter particularly in order that elite non-Brahman castes might not feel that they were losing by their

27. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p. 35.

28. See pp. 156-157.

association with traditionally low castes. This new social construct was to be the community of the oppressed itself, with its explanation of social evils in terms of the exploitation of all by one group, and its atmosphere of hope and striving for change.

As victims of conventional religious values, both 'clean' and untouchable castes belonged to this community, but Phule used different devices to convey their 'true' identities as members of it. In his treatment of 'clean' castes, he makes a skilful use of the ambiguities of caste divisions and statuses that were described in Chapter Three. At the level of jati, he describes the main body of the community as 'Mali-kunbi'. In the mid-nineteenth century, the term kunbi was an imprecise but comprehensive social category denoting all those that worked on the land.[29] The Mali caste, of whom Phule was a member, would have ranked close to the more respectable among the kunbis in ritual terms. In describing the 'clean' castes of the community of the oppressed in this way, Phule at once included his own caste, and linked them with the bulk of the rural population of western Maharashtra. In projecting this new community also as Sudra, Phule also touched upon the traditions of conflict that were described in Chapter Three.[30] He intended to provide a reminder of the Brahman denials of any but a low ritual status to all castes other than Brahmans. At the same time, the term Sudra was imbued with a new and radical meaning. Against the background of Brahman injustice, it no longer connoted the socially and

29. See pp. 24-28.

30. See pp. 38-50.

ritually base, but the community of the oppressed, who had by implication already recognised and rejected both the social categories of conventional Hindu belief, and the religious authority of its guardians.

Within this projected community of non-Brahman castes were also included Mahars and Mangs, the two major untouchable groups of western India. In place of the disabilities suffered by the ati-Sudra in the orthodox hierarchy, Phule gives him a central place in the fused group of the oppressed, as the inclusion of untouchable groups forms the touchstone of a genuinely caste-free society. Moreover, Phule makes it clear that the despised position of the untouchable, and the deception of the cultivator are a part of the same phenomenon. The commentator urges:

> 'Oh all you Malis and kunbis! If you read or listen to this debate, then it will be clear to you that you should rather let robbers fall onto your house than put your trust into a Brahman priest',

and he turns to the priest and tells him:

> 'You go and do a job of work, and you'll find that you will make a living in this world very well without insulting Mangs and Mahars'. 31

These attempts represented only the earliest and least sophisticated of Phule's efforts to convey a social identity for the community of lower castes that would be credible in terms of contemporary popular culture. This project was to remain his central concern as a polemicist and ideologue, and forms the main subject of Part 4.

31. Jotirao Phule, The Third Eye, Purogami Satyashodhak, op. cit., p. 24.

Chapter Seven.

Ritual status and political conflict in later nineteenth century Maharashtra.

1. New strategies for the attack on Brahman power.

Following his retirement from the Managing Committee of the schools for the lower castes in 1858, Phule devoted himself in the early 1860's to a variety of social reform campaigns: taking part in the early attempts in Pune to liberalise attitudes towards the remarriage of widows, opening an orphanage for the illegitimate children of high caste widows, and declaring publicly that untouchable castes might draw water from his well. Between 1869 and 1873, he entered on a major new period of literacy and polemical activity. In these crucial four years he constructed a critique of orthodox religion, and the social structures that it had helped to produce in western Indian society under British rule, which was to provide the ideological basis for the rest of his life's work and which sketched out the ideological framework within which the non-Brahman movement was later to conduct its debates.

The three major works of this period were, in order of their publication, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale,

1. See the biographical details on pp. 19-22.

published in June 1869;[2] Priestcraft Exposed, a collection of ballads published later in the same year;[3] and Slavery, published in 1873.[4] He also wrote a much smaller piece, Brahman Teachers in the Education Department, which was published anonymously in the Christian journal Satyadipika, then edited by the Christian convert, Baba Padmanji, in September 1869.[5]

2. The ballad was published at the Oriental Press in Bombay and was advertised for sale at six annas at the shop of Vasudev Babaji Navarange at Kalbadevi Road in Bombay, and at Phule's shop at Vetal Peth in Pune. See the title page to the first edition, reprinted in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 3.

3. Priestcraft Exposed was published at the Indu Prakash Press in Bombay, and advertised for sale at Phule's shop at a price of two annas.

4. The first page set out its title in English as follows:

SLAVERY
(IN THE CIVILISED BRITISH GOVERNMENT
UNDER THE CLOAK OF BRAHMANISM)
EXPOSED BY
JOTIRAO GOVINDRAW FULE.

It was published in Pune, quoting a price of twelve annas, and six annas 'to poor Sudras and ati-Sudras'. In the title, Phule evidently meant to draw a parallel with the condition of negro slaves in the United States. He dedicated the book 'to the good people of the United States, as a token of admiration for their sublime, disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery'.

5. This work is traceable to Phule firstly because the last lines contain an exhortation beginning 'Joti says', and, more conclusively, because it is cited as an example of Phule's ballad-writing in the review of his work Slavery in the journal Vividhadnyan Vistar. For a discussion of this review, see pp. 307-308. It is evident that this ballad represents one of a much larger collection of ballads now lost.

A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale consists ostensibly of a celebration of the exploits of the seventeenth century Maratha warrior. Its underlying purpose was to appropriate the figure of Sivaji in the ideological construction of a collective identity for all lower castes. Phule projected Sivaji himself as the leader of Maharashtra's Sudras and ati-Sudras, concerned at once with their welfare, and with the protection of Maharashtra against external enemies. The ballad had another dimension, which placed Sivaji within a startlingly new and overtly anti-Brahman interpretation of Maharashtra's history and culture. The ballad represented the Sudras and ati-Sudras as the forgotten descendants of the heroic race of Ksatriyas of ancient India, led by the mythical Daitya King Bali, who had been subdued by Brahmans at the time of the Aryan invasions, and who had remained subject to Brahman domination ever since. Phule supported this interpretation by deriving the term Ksatriya from the Marathi word ksetra, a field or place, and so arguing that the former term had originally denoted all those living peaceably together on the land before the arrival of the Brahman invaders. Phule used the ambiguities of Sivaji's own varna status to support his argument of the original Ksatriya identity of all Sudras, now concealed in the fictions of a Brahmanic religious hierarchy, and drew a parallel between Sivaji and the mythical King Bali as the leaders of the lower castes against external oppressors.

The collection of ballads entitled Priestcraft Exposed began with an account of the idyllic pre-Aryan realm of King Bali, and its invasion by Aryan Brahmans, and went on to tell of the way

in which Brahman priests in nineteenth century Maharashtrian society exploited its ignorant and illiterate peasant cultivators. Brahman Teachers in the Education Department was also a ballad, and concerned the dominance of Brahmans in the educational institutions of the British administration, their discouragement of the lower castes from educating themselves, and their hypocrisy in parading their social progressiveness before the British in order to win favours and employment, while continuing in private to cling to their idolatrous religious practices and their unregenerate caste pride. In choosing the ballad or pavada verse form, Phule attempted to place his work within the mainstream of Maharashtra's rich oral tradition.

Slavery was a long prose work. It began with an introduction in English, describing the Aryan invasions and the subsequent history of Brahman oppression in India. It followed this with an appeal to the British government to check the power of Brahmans in the administration by popular education and the employment of non-Brahmans. The book continued with a Marathi introduction describing in detail the sufferings of the original Ksatriyas at the hands of the Brahman invaders, comparing the former to the negro slaves in America. The main text was cast as a dialogue between Phule himself and one 'Dhondiba', and was divided into sixteen parts.[6] In the first nine, Phule rewrote many of the central episodes of Hindu religious mythology - the incarnations of Visnu; the story of King

6. This 'Dhondiba' was probably Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar, a friend and admirer of Phule's, and later a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj and prolific writer. See p. 314.

Bali and the dwarf, Vaman; the story of Parasuram's extirpation of the Ksatriyas - and argued it to represent the real history of ancient India, deliberately garbled by later Brahman writers in order to conceal their misdeeds and consolidate their power over the lower castes. Phule supported this by putting forward a re-interpretation of central elements in the social structure and popular culture of nineteenth century Maharashtra, and arguing them to be survivals from this remote period. In the tenth and eleventh parts of the book, Phule turned to more recent events, in the revival of Brahmanic authority after its eclipse by Buddhism. He suggested that in India, as in every part of the world, popular heroes had always arisen to protect the weak from oppressive authority in the way that King Bali had tried to do, and gave Christ and the Buddha as examples. The last parts of the work were devoted to a minute analysis of the position that Phule argued Brahmans had built up for themselves under British rule; the power that this gave them over the masses of lower caste Hindus; and the way in which the British government had allowed real power to slip from its hands into those of the high caste administrative and professional elite which served it.

Phule thus waged his ideological battle on two fronts. He attacked, what he thought to be the secular power of Brahmans as an administrative elite, by urging the education and employment of the lower castes; and by seeking to inform the British government of what he felt to be the designs of its Brahman employees. What he sought was not simply jobs for the lower castes in the British administration. He argued for a radical restructuring of that

administration itself, and for the transfer of greater power into the hands of sympathetic British administrators, so that the lower castes might be re-educated to a set of values more secular and egalitarian than those represented in Brahmanic religion. He regarded this as the pre-requisite for all other forms of liberation for the lower castes.

This brings us to the second part of Phule's strategy: the provision of an ideological basis on which a potential popular following might be brought to reject the religious hierarchies of conventional Hindu society. He felt that these hierarchies derived their strength from their roots in the most important Hindu religious accounts of the origins of Indian society and its proper divisions, and in the prescriptions which this religious literature contained for the social life of the pious Hindu. In particular, he argued that the strongest hold of religious tradition on the people derived from the extensive integration of Hindu religious literature into the popular culture and oral traditions of Maharashtra. Phule's answer to this was to provide alternative accounts of the texts, myths, and stories most common in popular Hinduism, and to link these with important symbols and structures from contemporary Maharashtrian society, in order to convey the real community of culture and interest that united all lower castes against their historical and cultural adversaries, the Brahmans. In his projection of this division, Phule drew skilfully on the traditions of martial heroism and identification with the land that were already prominent in popular culture. Chapter Three outlined the

tensions that existed between these local traditions and important sections of Brahman opinion in the Deccan. While the latter denied that any real Ksatriyas were left after the wars between Parasuram and the Ksatriyas described in puranic literature, local traditions in Maharashtra had always encouraged claims to a Ksatriya status from groups with the power and resources to do so. At the same time, this local tradition, centred around the twin symbols of the warrior and the tiller of the soil, formed a focus for the expression of loyalty and identification, making a model for social aspiration, for much wider circles in rural society. Moreover, the very disputes between Brahmans and Marathas earlier in the century, together with the criteria for elite status then established, and the relaxation of caste discipline under British rule, had acted to intensify aspirations to a Maratha Ksatriya identity throughout the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes.

In arguing that all lower castes could rightfully call themselves Ksatriya, Phule was able to harness the impetus of an existing process of upward social mobility to a very unconventional and radical end: that of suggesting a permanent and irreconcileable hostility between Brahmans and all other lower castes in society. The portrayal of this division was lent verisimilitude by representing the character of Parasuram, invoked by Brahmans themselves as the chief argument against Maratha claims to Ksatriya status, as the actual historical instrument of the expropriation of the Ksatriyas of ancient India. The resulting ambiguity in non-Brahman ideology was thereafter a great source of strength to the non-Brahman movement, and a great weakness. It was a source of strength in that it

allowed the retention of traditional loyalties and aspirations in a new radical guise. It was a weakness in that there was always the possibility of a slip back into a simple Sanskritising claim without any of the qualifying radicalism of Phule's own thought.

This assertion of an original Ksatriya identity for all lower castes also echoed the political dimension of traditional Maratha claims to Ksatriya ritual status. The latter had formed an essential adjunct to Pratapsinh Bhosale's attempt to restore some of the former power and symbolism of the Maratha Chatrapatis, after the latters' eclipse from the early eighteenth century. Phule's argument carried a similar attack on what he saw as the political power of Brahmans, but translated into new terms, to reflect both the growth of popular aspirations to an elite identity, and the changes in the nature of Brahman power under British rule. Phule made his claim for a Ksatriya identity as part of the argument that Maharashtra's culture and history had been shaped and given its unique character by its warriors and peasant cultivators. To their representatives, the true Ksatriyas of nineteenth century Maharashtra, belonged, therefore, the position of social power and political leadership that Brahmans had assumed under British rule.

2. Political conflict and the reinterpretation of tradition.

To call this assertion of Ksatriya status a political one, bearing upon the relationships of power within western Indian society, is clearly to read a new significance into the concern with ritual and varna status, and to extend our perceptions of political

conflict to new areas of ideology and activity. Yet this is necessary if our understanding of political conflict is not to remain constricted by the criteria and preconceptions outlined in Chapter One. It may be asked here how far this kind of ideological activity and concern with the significance of figures and episodes from Maharashtra's history was shared by other writers. Phule's was far from being the only attempt made to project a central historical and cultural tradition for Maharashtra, and appropriate this tradition for nineteenth century political causes. As we shall see in Chapter Ten, precisely this kind of reinterpretation, particularly of the figure of Sivaji, was to become the preoccupation of ideologues and polemicists from a whole variety of political groups. These divergent accounts of the same events, of necessity, competed with each other and formed a political debate of great importance to those who engaged in it.

These attempts to present aspects of Maharashtra's history and culture decisively as its central tradition, identifiable with nineteenth century projects and concerns, were aimed to attract social groups still rooted in traditional culture. Through the strong emotional identification with the glories of the Maratha past that existed in popular culture, political leaders right across the political spectrum, from Phule to Bal Gangadhar Tilak, were able to employ the figure of Sivaji, and the idea of a Maratha identity, in the attempt to attract a mass popular following.

Chapter Eight.

The Aryan invasions and the origins of caste society.

1. Brahman myths and the discovery of low caste identity.

The presentation of Brahmans as the descendants of Aryan invaders, who had conquered the indigenous inhabitants of the land and usurped the rightful power of their rulers, and who had imposed their religion as an instrument of social control, formed the central polemical device in Phule's explanation of the sufferings of the lower castes. It was through this argument that he was able to deny the legitimacy of Brahmanic religious authority, to assert the hidden Ksatriya identity of all lower castes, and to reinterpret the most important stories, figures and symbols in popular Hinduism from a new and radical perspective. In this interpretation of ancient Indian history, it is clear that Phule has drawn very heavily on the missionary accounts that were described in Chapter Four, and in particular on the arguments of John Wilson's work India Three Thousand Years Ago.[1]

In the English introduction to Slavery, Phule describes how 'the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahman race' came originally from a region beyond the Indus, attracted by the proverbial wealth of India and the fertility of its land. They met with fierce resistance from the original inhabitants whom they subjugated, and traces of this ancient struggle were still to be seen in the terminology used to describe the lower castes in the present day. The

1. See pp. 110-112.

term Sudra was popularly used to mean 'low' or 'insignificant' as to denote the lowest of the four varnas, while the term 'Mahar' probably derived from the phrase maha-ari, meaning 'the great enemy'.[2] Traces of this primeval conflict were also to be found in the religious writings of the Brahmans, in the accounts of the conflicts between the gods and their enemies, the Daityas, and the raksas, or demons, who tried to disrupt their worship: 'The original inhabitants with whom these earth-born gods, the Brahmans, fought, were not inappropriately termed Rakshas, that is - the protectors of the land'.[3]

In the introduction to the Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, Phule explained how the original inhabitants of India had been known as Ksatriyas, because they lived on and owned the land or ksetra. Brahma and Parasuram were not gods, as their present-day worship implied, but had been real historical figures, leaders in the Aryan onslaught. This had given rise to the story of Parasuram's attack on the Ksatriyas and his supposed extirpation of all true Ksatriyas from the earth.[4]

However, the Brahmans had been able to conceal this original act of usurpation, and to perpetuate their social privileges and religious authority through the institution of caste and the different

2. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 72. While Phule drew heavily on missionary and orientalist accounts of ancient India for his description of these ancient struggles and their survival in nineteenth century culture, his derivation of the term 'Mahar' from maha-ari, 'great enemy', is his own.

3. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 72-73. This derivation is also Phule's own.

4. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 7-8.

rights and duties that it assigned, described in the religious books of the Hindus:

> 'In order to fulfil their plan that those people should remain perpetually in slavery, and that they should be able to live comfortably on what the Sudras earned by the sweat of their brow, The Brahmans set up the fiction of caste divisions, and made up several books on it for their own selfish ends'. [5]

The institution of untouchability derived from the same conflict. The Mahars and Mangs of present-day society were only those whose ancestors had put up the fiercest resistance to the Brahman invaders. As a result, the Brahman rulers had singled them out for the special punishment of untouchability, and in the poverty caused by their exile from society they had taken to eating dead carcases. Other castes responded to this exactly as the Brahmans wished:

> 'Seeing this action of theirs, the Sudras of today - those who very proudly call themselves Malis, kunbis, Sonars, Simpis, Lohars, Sutars and other great titles, by adopting those trades - did not realise that their ancestors were all of one house, and that because they had fought against the Brahmans with especial force, the Brahmans had ruined them in this way and caused these divisions to be set up, and so they were taught to hate them as the Brahmans said'. [6]

In this linking of an idea of the ancient past with some of the central institutions and beliefs of present-day society, Phule injected his polemic with a great emotional power. For a potential low caste disciple, the discovery of his real identity and of the hidden history of his ancestors was intended to bring about an upheaval in his emotions as well as in his reasoned understanding of his social en-

5. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 91.

6. idem.

vironment. In the ballad Priestcraft Exposed, Phule endowed the same story with an enormous emotional appeal:

'Lawless men leagued together
They made Brahma their chief
They plundered and caused chaos

Beating the people and bringing them to their knees
Degrading them into slaves
See, these are the Sudras

The rest left over, a tiny number
Rose up and challenged Parasuram
They took care to remain united

Of their countrymen, their beloved brothers,
Many were slain
The Sudras no longer cared for unity

The maha-ari attacked Parasuram
Many women became widows
Parasuram routed the maha-ari

In constant fighting he broke their spirit
He did not spare pregnant women
He killed the newborn children.

The great enemies of the twice-born
Came to the end of their strength
Thrust down and defeated

Those that were left were punished severely
Abused as Mangs and maha-aris, great enemies
See, these are the Ksatriyas of the olden days'. 7

2. The incarnations of Visnu.

In his argument that many of the most important stories of popular Hindu mythology were but the distorted reflection of the ancient struggle between Brahmans and the Ksatriyas of pre-Aryan India, a clear difficulty for Phule would be that many of these stories lacked the sense of an historical progression that he was trying to convey. He therefore chose the parts of these stories

7. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 46-47.

that already possessed an element of such linear ordering: he centred his analysis around the ten incarnations of the god Visnu, representing these as the consecutive stages of the Aryan assault on the land of the ancient Ksatriyas. The first six incarnations of Visnu: Matsya, the fish; Kurma, the tortoise; Varah, the boar; Narasinha, the man-lion; Vaman, the dwarf; and Parasuram, Rama with the axe, are all interwoven with an account of the invasion of the Aryans.[8] This account takes up the first nine chapters of Slavery, and takes place in the form of a dialogue between Phule and Dhondiram.

The Aryans, Phule argued, had first made their attack in small boats that moved along through the water like fish, masa in Marathi. Hence, the nickname of their first leader came to be Matsya. These events were preserved in the popular memory, in a form deliberately garbled by Brahman writers, in the story in the Bhagavat purana, of Visnu having emerged from a fish.[9] The Aryan army mounted its next wave of attack in a larger boat. It was large and slow, resembling a tortoise in its movement. These were the real events behind the story of the second incarnation of Visnu, given in the Bhagavat purana. Here, Visnu appeared in the form of a tortoise or turtle to recover things of value lost in the deluge.[10]

In the story attached to the third incarnation, the boar Varah, a demon named Hiranyaksa had dragged the earth to the bottom

8. For information about these incarnations and the stories associated with them, see J. Dowson, A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1968.

9. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 98-99.

10. ibid., p. 100.

of the sea, and Visnu assumed the form of a boar to recover it, slaying the demon. The truth behind this myth lay in the unpleasant character of this particular leader of the Aryans:

> 'His nature and behaviour must have been loathsome, and wherever he went he must have won his battles by charging furiously like a wild boar. Therefore the Ksatriyas in the kingdoms of the brave Kings, the brothers Hiranyaksa and Hiranyakasipu called him a wild boar or pig in contempt, and as a result he must have been wild with anger; so he attacked their kingdoms continually, and inflicted much suffering on all the people living on the ksetras, and in the end, he slew Hiranyaksa in battle'. 11

Varah was followed as the leader of the Aryans by the fourth incarnation of Visnu, Narasinha, the man-lion. In the popular religious stories concerning Narasinha, Visnu assumed this form to deliver the world from the tyranny of the Daitya or demon King Hiranyakasipu, the brother of Hiranyaksa. In Phule's account, Narasinha became the cunning and voracious leader of the Aryans, who coveted the kingdom of the Ksatriya Hiranyakasipu and slew him to gain it. 12

Descended from Hiranyakasipu was the greatest leader of the ancient Ksatriyas, King Bali, who took steps to unite all the petty Ksatriya rulers of India in the effort to resist the Aryans. Vaman, the fifth incarnation of Visnu, but in reality the new leader of the Aryans, advanced to the frontier of Bali's kingdom, attacked his population of peaceful cultivators and caught Bali before he had time to gather any but his personal army. After a great fight, Bali fell in battle, and his son Banasura, was forced to flee. The popular memory of this great struggle found expression in the story of the

11. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 102.

12. ibid., pp. 102-103,

Bhagavat purana, in which Visnu assumed the form of Vaman, the dwarf, in order to subdue the overmighty Daitya King Bali. Vaman asked Bali, famed for his generosity, for three steps of the earth. Bali granted this, whereupon Visnu assumed the form of a giant and took three steps, over the earth, the sky and finally on Bali's head, pushing him down into the nether regions.[13]

Phule then broke with the conventional accounts of the incarnations, and described the next leader of the Aryans as Brahma. He clearly felt it necessary to include Brahma in his scheme, because of the latter's central place in the Hindu accounts of the origins of the four varnas in his limbs, and the tradition that the Vedas had been spoken by Brahma himself. After Vaman died, the lack of a custom of appointing an elder leader among the Aryans gave Brahma his chance. Brahma is represented as the typical popular stereotype of a Brahman, an avaricious, cunning and secretive clerk:

> 'There was a very skilful clerk by the name of Brahma, and he began to conduct all the affairs of state. He was extremely cunning, swam with the stream, and achieved his purposes in this way. No one put a scrap of faith in what he said, so the practice must have arisen of calling him the four-faced Brahma'. 14

Phule then integrated the association of the Vedas with Brahma into his account:

> 'Brahma first invented the practice of scratching on palm leaves with a sharp point, and collected together some magical incantations and false fables that he knew off by heart. He made little poems out of them, like those of the Parsis, in the language that was current everywhere (of which the corruption is Sanskrit) and carefully wrote

13. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 107-110.

14. ibid., p. 112.

> them out on palm-leaves. These then grew to be great popular favourites, and so thus the custom must have arisen of saying that all these stories, together with the knowledge of magical incantations, issued forth out of the mouth of Brahma'. 15

Brahma seized the opportunity created by the death of Banasura to invade his kingdom, and in the struggles that followed a very deep animosity grew up between the Brahmans and the ancient Ksatriyas that was still echoed in the divisions and exclusions of nineteenth century society. The prohibition in the writings of Manu of the education of Sudras arose out of the Brahmans' fear 'lest the Sudras should remember their former greatness, and then rebel against their authority'.[16]

We have already seen the importance of the figure of Parasuram, the sixth incarnation of Vismu, for Phule's argument. The version of the myth that he gave exploited these themes in popular culture to the full. Parasuram succeeded Brahma as head of the Aryans, whereupon the maha-ari, the small groups of Ksatriyas left unconquered, 'attacked Parasuram twenty-one times to free their brothers from the hands of the Brahmans, and with such force that they became known as 'dvaiti', and the corruption of that word has become 'Daitya''.[17] The Marathi term dvaiti means 'one who disagrees'. In this way , he gave a radical interpretation to the term 'Daitya', generally used in the basic myths of the Hindu tradition (as in the example of the good King Bali) to signify a race of demons who warred against the gods

15. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 112. Here, Phule makes rather a crude pun on the Marathi phrase sarvakrta, meaning 'everywhere in use', and the word 'Sanskrit'.

16. ibid., p. 114.

17. ibid., pp. 115-116.

and interfered with sacrifices. Parasuram inflicted a terrible defeat on the maha-ari, and their banishment from society formed the origins of the later institution of untouchability, and of the practice amongst untouchable castes of wearing a black thread around their necks:

> 'In order that they should never again lift up their hand against the Brahmans, he had a black thread tied around the neck of each of them as a sign, and prohibited even their Sudra brothers from touching them. He introduced the practice of calling these maha-ari Ksatriyas by the names of ati-Sudra, Mahar, antyag, Mang and Candal'. 18.

3. Ritual knowledge and special power.

Phule also placed in the context of his historical account the learning and knowledge of ritual and the sacred books of Hinduism, that formed the proper accomplishment of a Brahman priest. Phule was very clear about the way in which this monopoly of ritual knowledge operated to maintain the religious authority of the priesthood and its distinction from a laity that lacked any knowledge even of the language in which is was couched, let alone of its prescriptions for ritual and action, but which nevertheless believed

18. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 116.

in their importance and efficacy.[19] Phule's strategy here forms an interesting contrast to the missionary attempts to undermine Brahmanic religious authority by making freely available many of the most important Sanskrit texts that had previously been the exclusive property of Brahmans. Phule's tactic was different, setting the special knowledge of Brahman priests and the distinctive marks of Brahmanhood in general, in the same historical context as the religious myths. When Brahma invaded Bali's kingdom, he issued a white thread to each of his men for the purpose of mutual recognition in case of difficulty, 'which nowadays they call the sacred thread of the Brahmans'.[20] In addition to this, 'He taught to everyone a basic incantation that expressed his position, which nowadays they call the 'gayatri mantra', and impressed strictly upon them that whatever happened, they were not to reveal this to the Ksatriyas'. The Brahman warriors also wrote these magical formulae on their weapons before going into battle. After the defeat of the Ksatriyas, therefore, 'It was natural that the dread of Brahman knowledge should remain in the minds of all the credulous Ksatriyas'.[21] This ancient struggle had set the pattern for the contemporary control by Brahmans

19. Phule's analysis here bears some resemblance to Max Weber's later description of the basis of Brahmanic priestly power in 'knowledge'. Weber described how the possession of this knowledge shaped the human possibility for good and evil, so that all evil could be ascribed to the lack of it in ignorance. Brahmans were 'a status group of genteel literati whose magical charisma rests on "knowledge". Such knowledge was magical and ritualistic in character, deposited in a holy literature, written in a holy language remote from that of everyday speech'. Max Weber, The Religion of India, Free Press, New York 1958, p. 139.

20. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 113.

21. ibid. p. 119. The gayatri mantra was one of the sacred verses of the Vedas used in prayer by all twice-born castes.

of the knowledge of ritual which occupied such an important place in the lives of the lower castes: 'From all this, the bhat Brahmans cheat and deceive the ignorant Malis and kunbis with their rituals, repetitions of the name of god and their knowledge of magical formulae even in these enlightened times'.[22]

Phule also used the dating of different texts to point out the real status of the writings upon which the special power of the priest depended. Here again, it is clear that he has drawn on the arguments of missionary propaganda, hoping to affect a potential audience in much the same way as Baba Padmanji found his belief in the divine origins of the Vedas and in the power of the priest that repeated them undermined when he read that the Vedas could be dated in human terms.[23] Phule asked why it was that if the four Vedas issued from the mouth of Brahma, the later interpolations of the _rsis_ could be found in them. He also explained that internal evidence within the writings of Manu made it certain that it had been written well after the _Bhagavat_ purana, contrary to the former's reputation for a greater antiquity.[24]

Here, then, Phule presented an explanation of Brahman learning, its exclusiveness and portentious secrecy, that could be taken up by a low caste Hindu determined to deny that such enormous religious power could rest exclusively in the hands of one group. Phule concluded his account in _Slavery_ by describing the subsequent diffusion of Brahmanic myth and ritual amongst the _Ksatriyas_ of ancient

22. Jotirao Phule, _Slavery_, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 120

23. See Pp. 158-159.

24. Jotirao Phule, _Slavery_, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 120-121.

Hindu society, and their decline from this once proud warrior tradition to their lowly status as Sudras in the nineteenth century. In this early period had been laid the foundations for the future ideological hegemony of Brahmans as a social group:

> 'When Parasuram had defeated Banasura's peasant soldiers, some Brahmans, who were as cowardly and mischievous as the wives of Narad, saw that their ritual incantations exercised a great effect over the minds of the Ksetrapatis. So they wandered around the houses of the ignorant Ksetrapatis, making up stories about Ramacandra and Ravana, Krsna and Kamsa, Kaurava and Pandava, twanging the strings of their lyres to impress the women and children, dancing up and down and clapping their hands and making a show of imparting important knowledge to them. Amongst themselves, these Brahmans arranged the plausible-sounding stories that they were to tell the people, to foment quarrels and divisions amongst them.
>
> All this placed the power of the Brahmans in a secure position. Meanwhile, the Brahman authors got together and mixed up all their magic incantations, stupid stories and prognostications, and concocted a lot of new and impressive-sounding books: Smrtis, Sanhitas, sastras, puranas and so on. In this way, they established the superiority of the Brahman people over all the Sudras. They caused the people to give up their traditional occupations as warriors and assumed great airs of religious superiority'. 25

Phule's last sentence here points to an important aspect of his polemic that will emerge in the next chapter on popular culture. In his interpretation of religious mythology, he attempted to discredit accounts both of the origins of the social order and of the special power of Brahmans. However, his polemic also had a strong positive side. This was partly, as we have seen, in the reflection of existing social processes in the assertion that all lower castes, including untouchables, had been robbed by Brahmans of their true Ksatriya identity. This connection between present social processes and

25. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p.120. Narad was the son of Brahma and one of the ten original rsis. He delighted in causing quarrels.

an ancient past did not draw in only upwardly mobile groups, since the local elite identity that was the object of aspiration did not only affect those who might claim such an identity for themselves directly. It involved the very much wider groups of agricultural, artisan and service castes, including untouchables, for whom the Maratha identity formed a focus for loyalty and indirect identification, through such means as the celebration of a particular caste's role in the military victories of the Maratha armies. In turn, Phule used this ability to appeal to a very wide range of groups to suggest the real unity of all these heterogenous lower castes. The martial and landowning traditions of Maharashtra are made the basis on which to build a detailed picture of a heroic warrior past in India, which has been buried beneath the mystifications of Brahmanic religion. The identification with this local tradition is converted into an expression of loyalty to the community of all the lower castes, which exists in specific opposition to Brahmans, as the upholders of an oppressive religious orthodoxy.

4. The Aryan past and the idea of a golden age.

One of the most strikingly original aspects of Phule's thought here was his use of the idea of an Aryan past. Like many other episodes and figures from Indian history, the term 'Arya' was given new interpretations for use in the ideological battles of the later nineteenth century. Where Phule was original was in his attribution of an entirely negative meaning to the term 'Arya', which contrasted strongly with its more conventional treatment as the golden age of Hinduism. Max Muller used the idea of an ancient Aryan culture to

emphasise the common parentage of Europeans and Indians in a highly civilized culture.[26] Bal Gangadhar Tilak used the idea to emphasise the superiority of Asiatic Aryan culture. He regarded the conquest and assimilation of non-Aryans as a sign not of tyranny and injustice, but of the strength and vitality of the Aryan races.[27] The religious traditions of the Aryans, which Phule regarded as an instrument of oppression, were presented by Mahadev Govind Ranade as the basis for national political unity. Ranade also drew unfavourable comparisons between the original customs of the Aryans, and their subsequent deterioration due to the influence of Dravidians and hill tribes in the south, responsible for the introduction of customs that degraded women, sati, polygamy, polyandry and communal land tenure.[28] Dayananda Saravati and Aurobindo Ghose denied that there had been a struggle between the Aryans and Dravidians that had given rise to the varna system; the present Sudras were merely the descendants of ignorant Aryans who should be absorbed back into the Aryan fold. Dayananda Saravati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, constructed in his Satyartha a theory of the ancient

26. For an account of the debates surrounding Muller's concept of a common Aryan origin for Europeans and Indians, see N.C. Chaudhuri, Scholar Extraordinary: the Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Muller, P.C. Chatto and Windus, London 1974, pp. 311-343.

27. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, The Arctic Home in the Vedas, Pune 1903, quoted in J. Leopold, 'The Aryan Theory of Race', Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. 7, no.2, June 1970, p. 275.

28. M.G. Ranade, Religious and Social Reform, ed. M.B. Kolasker, quoted in J. Leopold, op. cit., pp. 279-281.

Aryan past as complex as Phule's, in which Aryan dynasties had ruled over the entire world, and spread education and the Vedic religion to most of the western world. Like Ranade's his definition of the term was an intellectual and moral, rather than a racial one: it represented justice, virtue and learning.[29] All these thinkers, like Phule, had drawn on the work of orientalists and Sanskritists such as Max Muller, but had emerged with quite a different set of connotations for the idea of an Aryan past; it is noteworthy also that of all the writers mentioned here, Phule was much the earliest: Ghose, Tilak and Ranade were all writing at the very end of the century, while Dayananda's Satyartha came out two years after Phule's Slavery, in 1875. Phule was very much a pioneer in the art of speaking about the present through the concepts and symbols of the past, and we will see this repeated in his work on Sivaji.

Another theme worth noting here that is shared both by Phule and by those for whom the idea of ancient Aryan society represented a lost ideal, is that of a 'golden age' that is followed by a 'fall' and a decline into the corruption of the present. For Phule of course, this 'golden age' was represented by the pre-Aryan realm of Ksatriyas under the benign rule of King Bali and the Khandobas. Here, it is possible to see a series of structural similarities or parallels running through the different parts of Phule's work. This extends from his description of the pre-Aryan kingdom of Bali,

29. For an account of Dayananda Saravati's Satyartha, see J.T.F. Jordens, Dyananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas, Oxford University Press 1978, pp. 99-126.

to his conception of a pre-social and hence undifferentiated human identity. It is interesting to compare some of Victor Turner's ideas, in the context of social protest among low status groups. He draws on his research in African societies with a tradition of the conquest of indigenous peoples, to show how the same nexus of concerns may be produced among groups at the lower levels of society, that characterises Phule's own thought - the search for a wholeness that has been lost, a wholeness that has been represented by the land itself in its ancient unbroken state and by the undifferentiated human community that occupied it, as against the divided social and political roles that were introduced in the 'fall' represented by conquest from without. Turner describes how

> these autochthonous people have religious power, the "power of the weak" as against the jural-political power of the strong and represent the undivided land itself as against the political system with its internal segmentation and hierarchies of authority. Here the model of an undifferentiated whole, whose units are total human beings, is posited against that of a differentiated system, whose units are status and roles, and where the social persona is segmentalised into positions in a structure'. 30

Here, then, it may be asked whether it is a characteristic of social protest movements, in societies with some residual ideas of a conquest in the distant past, and divisions in culture and status that might be interpreted to be the product of such a conquest, to centre protest around the idea of indigenous ownership of the land.

30. Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1974, p. 234.

Chapter Nine.

Warriors and Cultivators: the reinterpretation of popular culture.

1. Introduction.

Phule thus provided an account of the ancient past in which the ritual and mythology of orthodox Brahmanic religion were presented as instruments used to delude and exploit a community that had forgotten its real identity. He also attempted to give these ideas a concrete social meaning by integrating into his account a wealth of practices, beliefs and symbols from contemporary popular culture and religion. In this way, he hoped to make it possible for potential followers to 'discover' a common identity for all lower castes existing in the midst of familiar institutions and traditions, whose true significance had always been concealed by the mystifications of Brahmanic religion.

The figures which feature most prominently in Phule's account are the god Khandoba, and the good Daitya King Bali of Hindu mythology.[1] In Khandoba, Phule chose one of the central figures of popular religious culture in Maharashtra, who was the *kuladevata* or guardian deity of the Maratha and *kunbi* group of castes. His chief shrine was (and still is) at Jejuri, where he is pictured as a *linga*, although as the guardian deity of the Deccan he is more often portrayed as a horseman with a sword in his right hand. He was also

1. See pp. 202-203.

worshipped under different names, according to his various aspects: the gods Mhasoba, Bahiroba and Martand were all different names of Khandoba, and likewise central figures in the religious and agricultural year of western Maharashtra's largest group of cultivating and peasant castes. Originally, Khandoba was probably a local deity, and has been Sanskritised as an avatar of Siva.[2] In a sense, Phule was trying to reverse this process of the Sanskritisation of local deities, and to detach this local religious tradition from its association with the all-India traditions of Hinduism.

The convert Krsnarav Ratnaji Sangle has left a very valuable account from the 1860's of the worship of Khandoba in his family, a family of the Sali or weaver caste who were roughly equivalent in ritual status to respectable Malis and kunbis.[3] Very significantly, Sangle prefaced his account by describing how the gods that Hindus worshipped were determined by their castes. The Brahman castes centred their worship around the ritual of the sacred thread, and paid little attention to ghosts and evil spirits. Marathas and other cultivators made Khandoba the main object of their worship. The untouchable castes of Mahars and Mangs worshipped ghosts and

2. For an account of the god Khandoba, see R.C. Dhere, Khandoba, Pune 1961, and Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, Biroba, Mhaskoba und Khandoba: Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pastoralen Gottheiten in Maharashtra. Wiesbaden 1976. (German, with English synopsis), pp. 180-198.

3. For previous references to Krsnarao Ratnaji Sangle, see pp. 160-162.

spirits, such as Mariai, Janai and Jokhai.[4]

Sangle described how

> 'Every Sunday, we always used to perform the ritual of presenting offerings to Khandoba. A dish filled with betel leaves, coconut and turmeric was lifted up in offering with the burning of incense, and we all shouted 'Victory to Khandoba' three times. Then everyone put turmeric on on their forehead, distributed the leaves and coconut, and then taking lights and vessels of oil we stood outside in the courtyard and scattered the turmeric towards the sky, made a salutation, and shouted greetings such as 'Har, Har Mahadev', 'Prosperity to Cintaman More', 'Victory (the Marathi is cang bhala) to Bahiroba', 'Hail to Malukhan', and so on'. [5]

We have already seen how Phule interpreted the other figure with which we are concerned here, the good King Bali.[6] The figure of Bali was strongly identified in nineteenth century popular culture with the tillers of the soil. In his classic examination of the sociology and culture of the village, made in 1915, T.N. Atre discussed the figure of Bali, bringing out also the potent symbolism in Maharashtrian culture of the life of the village, the tilling of the soil, and the figure of the cultivator himself, the labourer and provider. In a predominantly rural society, these images would clearly evoke a strong sense of identification and loyalty:

> 'It is the kunbis who have taken up the burden of providing for the support and nourishment of the world, and so people call the kunbis 'King Bali'. The puranic story of how King Bali gave the world away to Vaman is very well known. There is no occupation like that of tilling the soil for building

4. Krsnarao Ratnaji Sangle, MSS Autobiography, Chapter entitled 'Our religion is Hindu - but should we call it Hindu, or pure Arya?'

5. idem.

6. See pp. 202-203.

> up the strength (the Marathi word is bala) of the body, and all other castes agree that no caste is as strong as the kunbis. Therefore, perhaps as the Brahmans are called 'pandit' so the kunbis are called 'Bali', meaning 'possessed of strength'. 7

The figure of Bali was also associated in popular culture with a 'golden age', a happier state of society now vanished. This was expressed in the very common Marathi proverb, 'May all sorrows and troubles disappear, and the kingdom of Bali come'.[8]

Phule's choice of the figures of Khandoba and Bali was therefore a very careful one. Organising his account of the 'hidden history' of the lower castes around them, he was given immediate access to a whole range of already existing identities and loyalties.

2. The community of Ksatriyas and the pre-Aryan state.

In his collection of pavadas entitled Priestcraft Exposed, describing 'who ruled and how in this blessed land of Hindusthan before the Brahman conquest', Phule presented a picture of happy communities of Ksatriyas, ruled over by their leader King Bali, and by officials that were known as 'Khandobas', among whom were Bahiroba, Mhasoba and Martand:[9]

7. T.N. Atre, Gavagada, p. 5.

8. Rev. A. Manwaring, Marathi Proverbs, Oxford 1899, p. 137.

9. Where the Marathi word is necessary for the reader to make sense of Phule's play on words, I have given this in brackets. Where Phule himself has turned one Marathi phrase into another, I have given both in brackets.

'A power with nine provinces (khanda) was united together
Kasi was the tenth
The many took care to preserve their unity.

Serious and virtuous, brave in battle
To each province (khanda) one was appointed to rule
He was called a 'Khandoba'

Great heroes; Martand their chief
The black Bahiri was also made a leader
He treated the other nine Khandobas well

The country was great; mighty officials (subhas) were appointed
They carried out the business of their masters
All who saw the country were struck with admiration

The chief official (maha subha, rendered as 'Mhasoba') supporting them
No less clever and strong
Another like the black Bahiri

Enquiries about justice were given to the wise
They appointed many to help
The chief justices of the nine districts (navakhandaca nyaya, rendered as 'Navakhanaci Janai')

Many footsoldiers, strong horses,
The archers no less skilled
The spears bound to their shoulders

They fought both with diplomacy and with arrows
The wrestlers went into battle
The many took care to preserve their unity

If small princes fell into difficulty
They would come running to their help
They took the seven into shelter (sata asrayit, rendered as 'Sati Asara')

Rainwater was plentiful
Power was exerted gently
The happiness of heaven pales beside' 10

10. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed. D. Keer and S.G.Malshe pp. 45-46. The introduction to this work is signed 'B.P', and it is very probable that this was the Christian convert Baba Padmanji. He said in the introduction that many people might feel that the cunning and deceptions of Brahman priests was common knowledge among all educated and enlightened people, so that they might ask whether such a work as Priestcraft Exposed had any point. However he explained, 'The Brahmans still work their wiles amongst the kunbis, Malis and other Sudra people, and this to an extent that the enlightened people of today do not realise'. Introduction signed 'B.P.' to Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed. D. Keer and S.G. Malshe. p.43

Phule here encompasses a whole range of figures, symbols and beliefs from popular religious culture, the village gods and goddesses that would have been a central part of the religious life of the village cultivator. Bahiri is a familiar appellation of the god Bahiroba, while the 'black Bahiri' is the presiding deity of Kasi, which gives Phule the link for the reference in the second line.[11] He also includes figures that Sangle describes as specifically Mang and Mahar deities, such as the Janai of the sixth verse.[12] Why she should be 'of nine khan' (Navakhanaci) is not clear, although this may have some reference to the practice of presenting a goddess with a blouse-piece, or khan during worship. The 'Sati Asara' of the ninth verse were popularly believed to be the ghosts of young women who commit suicide by drowning themselves after giving birth, and would have been feared and propitiated in village religious culture in the same way as other ghosts and evil spirits.[13]

Phule continued his description in his work Slavery. King Bali was the greatest ruler of the old communities of Ksatriyas, to each of which he had appointed a Khandoba. Phule linked his description of the Khandobas directly with contemporary popular practices. The great popularity of the ruler Mhasoba in the pre-Aryan communities was still reflected in the practices of the Marathas

11. Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary, p. 163.

12. The Pune Volume of the Bombay Gazetteer describes Janai as a local goddess. Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. 18, No.1, p.553.

13. Maharashtra Sabda Kosa, Pune 1932, Vol. 1, p. 295.

in the nineteenth century:

> 'You will not find one family among the Marathas who do not set up in the grounds around their village some stone or other in the name of Mhasoba, smear it with red lead, and offer incense to it; who, without taking Mhasoba's name will not put his hand to the seed-box of the plough, will not put the harrow to the field, and will not put the measure to the heap of threshed corn on the threshing floor'. 14

Bali's kingdom stretched as far as Kasi. Here again, Phule used a pun on words to make a connection between his account and elements in nineteenth century popular religion: 'There were some lands under Bali's rule near Ayodhya, which were called the tenth province. There, the chief official at one time was called the 'black Bahiri'. The same official was the chief officer of the police of the town (kotaval)'.[15] The 'black Bahiri' of Kasi was also known as the 'Kotaval' of the town.[16] Bali also held sway over many lesser rulers. Here, Phule explained his earlier reference to the 'seven given shelter', which he had in turn derived from the 'Sati Asara', the spirits of drowned women: 'Seven of the Ksetrapatis made over the management of their affairs to King Bali and made use of his support. Therefore, we find that their names came to be

14. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 106. The word 'Maratha' is here spelt 'Marhathe'. The god Mhasoba is still represented as a stone covered in red lead, and can be seen outside the walls of most Maharashtrian villages.

15. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 106.

16. Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary, p. 162 and 163.

'the seven given shelter'. They were given this name to reproach them for their 'womanly' lack of courage.[17] Concern for the welfare of the tillers of the soil had been the main priority of the rulers of the pre-Aryan state: 'Out of all the great heroes under Bali, Bahiroba, Jotiba and the nine Khandobas were unsurpassed in their striving for the happiness of the cultivators'.[18]

3. The reinterpretation of popular culture.

With great ingenuity, Phule traced many more general practices and beliefs current in nineteenth century Maharashtra to this idyllic pre-Aryan society. The practice of presenting a tali or dish of offerings to Khandoba, which Sangle described, originated under King Bali's rule:

> 'When King Bali had some work of importance to devolve upon his sardars, he would hold a session of his court, and spread out some turmeric powder, coconut and a roll of betel leaves on a platter, and say "Whoever has the courage to take up this work should pick up this roll of betel leaves". So the man who had the courage to see the task through would take the oath "Har, Har Mahavir", apply the turmeric to his forehead, pick up the coconut and the roll of betel leaves and raise it over his head, thus signifying his acceptance of the task. Bali would give the work to this man. Then this warrior would take Bali's orders, break up camp and move in upon the enemy. From this, the name of the rite came to be tal ucalane. The corruption of this is tali ucalane'.[19]

17. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 106, and ibid., p. 116 for the reference to their 'womanly' lack of courage.

18. ibid., p. 107.

19. ibid., p. 106-107.

In this passage, Phule constructed a complex network of meaning that integrated contemporary practices into his historical account. The term for a roll of betel leaves is vida; the term vida ucalane denotes the acceptance of a challenge. Molesworth tells us 'The expression originates in a custom of throwing a wira (vida) into the midst of an assembly (as of warriors, statesmen, etc.) in indication of defiance or invitation to some arduous work'.[20] The term tal ucalane means 'to break camp', while tali ucalane, 'picking up the tali' refers to the practices concerned with the worship of Khandoba that we saw outlined in Sangle's account. The reverence in which the old leaders were held, Phule argued, had resulted in their now being regarded as deities among the Marathas:

> 'Before the commencement of any auspicious work, no Maratha will fail to perform the rite of picking up the tali. In this rite, they regard Bahiroba, Jotiba and Khandoba as deities, and take their names as they lift up the tali as follows: 'Har, Har Mahadev. Cang bhala to Bahiroba and Jotiba'.[21]

20. Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary, p. 757.

21. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 107. The cry of 'Har, Har Mahadev' or 'Mahavir' forms the Maratha battle-cry, invoking the god Siva as 'Hari' and 'Mahadeva'.

The custom of Sunday worship amongst the cultivating castes had likewise derived from this early period:

> 'King Bali and all his subjects used to regard Sunday as a holy day, and took the names of the great gods on that day. Therefore, among the Marathas of today, the Mangs, Mahars, kunbis and Malis, the people will not touch even a drop of water before they have poured water on the image of the gods and made them an offering of food on this day of the week'. 22.

Likewise the defeat of King Bali by Vaman was kept alive in folk memory and reflected in the rituals of Marathas on the day of Dasara, the tenth day of the month of Asvin.[23] After the defeat of King Bali,

> 'On the tenth day of Asvin in the evening, Banasura's people each went to their own homes, where their wives, knowing the prophecy that a second Bali would come and establish the kingdom of God upon earth, stood at the threshold of the house, waved lamps around them and said "May all sorrows - the power of the twice-born - disappear and the Kingdom of Bali come". From that day until now, thousands of years have passed by, but still the women of the descendants of the Ksatriyas of Bali's kingdom, on the tenth day of Asvin wave lamps around their husbands and sons, still not giving up the hope that Bali's kingdom may come.[24]

Here again, Phule took a series of contemporary customs and gave

22. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 107. This is consistent with Krsnarao Ratnaji Sangle's account of his family's Sunday worship.

23. The Hindu Dasara Festival lasts for the first ten days of the light half of the month of Asvin. This central festival of all-India Hinduism celebrates the victories of Rama, whose exploits are represented in the work Rama Lila, a dramatisation of the principal incidents of the Ramayana, designed, as A.C. Mukherji tells us 'to instruct ignorant audiences in the moral teachings of the great Hindu epic'. A.C. Mukherji, Hindu Fasts and Feasts, Allahabad 1916, p. 118. For an account of the complexities of the Hindu calendar, see A.K. Chakravarty, The Origin and Development of Indian Calendrical Science, Calcutta 1975.

24. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 108.

them a new meaning. B.A. Gupte described how at the festival of Divali in Maharashtra, women prepare images of King Bali, worship them and repeat the blessing 'May all evils disappear and Raja Bali's empire be restored'.[25] P.V. Kane described how Bali was worshipped on the first day of the month of Kartika, when people set up an image of Bali inside their houses and worshipped it with fruit and flowers.[26] A. Manwaring referred to the verse concerning Bali and explained 'The Sudras are fond of King Bali because he took their part against Vaman and the Brahmans. The phrase is still used at the Dasara festival'.[27]

The Maratha practice of the celebration of dead warrior heroes referred to a much older episode, when 'On the first day of the month of Phalagun, each of Banasura's Ksatriya subjects took a naked sword in their hands, and became warriors in the name of their relatives fallen in battle, and honoured them by dancing very joyfully'.[28] This refers to the practice described by B. A. Gupte

25. B.A.Gupte, Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials, with Dissertations on Origins, Folklore and Symbols. Calcutta 1919. p. 36.

26. P.V. Kane, A History of Dharmasastra. Pune, 1958-1975, Vol. 5. Pt. 1, pp. 201-202.

27. Rev. A. Manwaring, op. cit., p.118. M.M. Underhill discusses the popular festivals concerned with Bali, in which some groups celebrate his defeat and light lamps to avoid falling under his power after Vaman has trodden him down into the nether regions, and others pray for the restoration of his kingdom. He suggests that the wish for Bali's kingdom to 'return' is most common among the Sudras, 'Whose champion, Bali, was against the overbearing higher castes. If this is correct, we have the interesting sight of a festival kept by the descendants of two parties to a long-ago struggle, both camps celebrating both protagonists on successive days'. M.M. Underhill, The Hindu Religious Year, Calcutta 1921, p. 64.

28. Jotirao Phule, Slavery. D. Keer and S.G.Malshe. p.109.

that took place on the full-moon day of the month of Phalagun, when 'Among the Marathas proper, the Vir, or people who died on the battle-field, are 'danced' by their descendants, who go around the fire with a drawn sword until they get into a trance, or believe themselves possessed by the spirits of the hero'.[29] The Pune edition of the Bombay Gazetteer linked this practice to the start of the agricultural year, when offerings were made up to three generations of dead warriors.[30]

Phule extended his interpretation to another crucial set of reference points for the structure of popular religious consciousness - the religious calendar. The importance of this for his attempt to provide an ideological reorientation of perceptions of social and religious conventions needs hardly be emphasised. In the organisation of time itself lay a potent source for the ascription of a religious meaning to everyday activities. Moreover, it was often through the religious festivals and observances of the great tradition of Hinduism, celebrated throughout India and drawn from the events of classical Hindu mythology, that the lower castes at the local level, whose system of belief might otherwise have remained attached to local figures and cults, were integrated into the beliefs and practices of all-India Hinduism. Phule took the central festivals of the all-India religious year - mainly in the months of Asvin and Kartika, and organised the battle between Vaman and Bali around them. The sraddha ceremony performed in the dark half

29. B.A. Gupte, op. cit., p. 87.

30. Bombay Gazetteer, Vol. 18, No. 1. p.295.

of the month of Bhadrapad to the manes of male ancestors recalled the fighting between the forces of Bali and Vaman during this part of the month.[31] Phule conflated the sati of Bali's wife, Vindhyavali, on the eighth day of the Navaratra or Dasara festival with the Durga puja which is celebrated on the eighth day of the ten days of the festival. The Durga puja is very much a women's festival, in which bands of women go daily to worship at a Durga temple, so Phule may here be aiming at female religious consciousness.[32] The Durga puja had really originated with the sati of Vindhyavali, on her hearing of the death of Bali in battle.[33]

Phule integrated into his account the important tenth day of the Navaratra, the 'Vijayadasami' or 'glorious tenth'. On this occasion, the men of the village cross over the village boundary, take some leaves from the sami tree, which, considered to represent 'gold' on this day, are 'looted' by the men and brought back in triumph to the village. This day was also considered the most auspicious time among Maratha chiefs for starting a campaign.[34] These rites represented the garbled folk memory of Vaman's attack and looting of the dead Bali's capital city.[35] Next, Phule incorporated the beliefs and practices of the Kojagari purnima, the full-moon day of Asvin following the Durga puja, in which the goddess Laksmi is

31. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G.Malshe, p. 107. For an account of the sraddha ceremony in the month of Bhadrapad, see M.M. Underhill, op. cit., pp. 112-118.

32. For an account of the Durga puja, see A.C. Mukherji, op cit., p. 120. and M.M. Underhill, op. cit., p. 55.

33. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 107.

34. For a description of the ceremonies of Vijayadasami, see B.A. Gupte op.cit., pp 180-183 and M.M. Underhill, op. cit., pp 56-57.

35. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 108.

believed to make a circuit of the earth and bestow her favours on anyone she finds awake. Coconut milk should be drunk at midnight, and a light shown outside the house to make the goddess pause and give her blessing. Offerings of fruit, flowers and sweets are made to her.[36] These rites recalled the vigil spent by Vaman and his forces making offerings before his god and praying for victory over Banasura and his forces.[37]

Phule completed his account with a reinterpretation of the Divali festival, which takes place between the thirteenth day of the dark half of Asvin to the second day of the light half of Kartika. Divali centres around the worship of the goddess Laksmi, and each house is illuminated to attract her wealth. It is a festival of feasting and rejoicing, and culminates in the rite of bhaubij. Here, every man must dine at his sister's house, (to celebrate the dining of Yama, the god of death, with his sister), and small lamps are waved around the heads of the men. As we have seen, Bali himself is worshipped during Divali, on the day immediately before bhaubij, the first day of the light half of Kartik. Phule drew all these elements together into his account. These popular rites recalled the great rejoicing together of the Ksatriyas at the defeat of Vaman, when the women feasted their brothers in celebration, and 'waved lamps around their heads and reminded them of the Bali who would come again, saying "May all sorrows and troubles disappear and Bali's

36. For an account of the rites and beliefs of the Kojagari Laksmi puja, see A.C. Mukherji, op.cit., pp. 126-131.

37. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 109.

kingdom come"'.[38]

Phule therefore constructed with great ingenuity a complete rival interpretation of the conventional Hindu religious year. Its adoption by a potential follower would not have entailed any sense of the dislocation that would have accompanied the complete distruction of traditional categories of thought and practice; conventional practices could be maintained, but merely invested with a new significance.

4. The reinterpretation of social categories.

The other contemporary social categories that Phule incorporated into his scheme were the varna categories of Ksatriya and Sudra-ati-Sudra, and the term 'Maratha'. The argument that the Sudras and ati-Sudras of the present day were the displaced and deprived descendants of the Ksatriyas of pre-Aryan India was, with its invocation of Maharashtra's warrior and agricultural traditions, and its explicit appeal to existing loyalties and social aspirations, the cornerstone of Phule's attempt to construct a new identity for the lower castes. In his A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, Sivaji is described as 'the child of the great warrior Ksatriya'.[39] The ballad is intended for 'the ruined Ksatriyas, kunbis, Malis, Mahars and Mangs'.[40] As we shall see in the next chapter, Sivaji

38. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 110.

39. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 6.

40. ibid., p. 7.

is appropriated to the lower caste cause and made into the archetypal leader of the erstwhile Ksatriyas, the lower castes, by the implicit conflation of Sivaji with King Bali. Sivaji's mother tells him of the life of his ancestors:

> 'The home of the Ksatriyas was on the land (rendered as ksetra)
> Your forefathers were great heroes
> There was no limit to their happiness
> In every way it was their mother country' [41]

Phule makes the connection between the two varna categories, again obliquely, by the use of a pun: 'Jotirao Phule sings of the son of the Ksudras, the chief master of the peshwas'.[42] Here, the word ksudra both recalls the term Ksatriya and points to the origin of the term Sudra as he has described it in the Marathi word ksudra, meaning 'base'. Sivaji is described as 'the first King among the ksetriyas', meaning 'the Sudras of the south'.[43] In the final verse of the ballad, he makes a startlingly direct connection between this perception of ancient history and the access to forms of western education and scholarly research into the past that made such a perception possible: 'English learning came, so I call myself the son of the land (rendered as ksetra); this puts an end to the tricks of the Brahmans'.[44] In the introduction to the work Slavery, he emphasised the 'cruelties and atrocities which Parasuram committed on the Kshetriyas, the people of this land'.[45] After Parasuram's

41. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 18

42. ibid., p. 38.

43. ibid., p. 37.

44. ibid., p. 38.

45. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 74.

victory, the Brahman writers composed the bulk of what were now regarded as the sacred writings of the Hindus, the 'smrtis, sanhitas, sastras and puranas', in which 'they established the superiority of the Brahmans over the Sudras, and took away from them their ancestral occupation of soldiering'.[46] He emphasised the community of the Sudras and ati-Sudras of the present day with the suffering Ksatriyas of the past:

> 'When the Sudras and ati-Sudras of the present day reflect from which line they are descended, and whose blood and flesh is one with their own, it is no great surprise that when they hear of their sufferings they themselves feel the greatest of pain.' [47]

Phule preferred to use the terms Sudra-ati-Sudra or Mali-kunbi and Mang-Mahar to denote the community of the lower castes, rather than any variation of the term 'Maratha'. At the same time, however, he was directly engaged in interpreting the history and cultural heritage of Maharashtra as the product of the social and religious life of the lower castes, given its dynamism by their struggles with the usurpers of their rightful powers. The events of history, both ancient (Bali and the Ksatriyas) and more recent (Sivaji), the nature of social structure as the human community of those who laboured on the land, and the religious consciousness of man as the creature of a just God, constituted for Phule the real cultural heritage of Maharashtra. It formed a unity, a stream of common consciousness, recently submerged beneath the excrescences

46. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 120.

47. ibid., p. 87.

of an alien social and religious power, but awaiting only the emergence of a new leader to proclaim the real identity of the lower castes and lead them to victory in the struggle to reform contemporary society and politics. Despite Phule's preference for an indirect approach to the reinterpretation of Maharashtra's history and culture, avoiding the terms 'Maharashtra' and 'Maratha', their very centrality to his project meant that he had to provide some account of their meaning. 'Maharashtra' he argued to have derived from 'maha-rastra', the 'great country' over which King Bali had ruled. The term 'Maratha' had a connected origin: 'In the south, there were other lands under Bali's rule, which were called Maharashtra, and all the Ksetravasi people that lived there were called 'Maharashtri'; the corruption of this must be 'Marathe'.[48] The term in present day society belonged properly to the community of the lower castes. Thus, the practice of Sunday worship was kept mainly by 'the Marathas of today, i.e. Mangs, Mahars, kunbis and Malis'. In the Sivaji ballad, the men of the hilly country to the west and south of Pune, of whom Sivaji's armies were composed, are referred to as 'Marathas'. In

48. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 105.

Sivaji's attack on Shaista Khan in Pune,

> 'Jijabai's first home was in Pune
> The Khan lived in that house
> There was a watch on the city against the Marathas entering
> They were afraid of Sivaji'. 49

This interpretation was new in the social content that it gave to the term 'Maratha', especially in its inclusion of Mangs and Mahars. It was also new in its sharp awareness of the potential polemical importance of the term as a symbol for some of the central identities and traditions in Maharashtra's history and culture, that might be appropriated for the ideological purposes of other social and political groupings. Both Phule's attempts at reconstruction, and the concern with the significance of individual terms together reflected a new readiness amongst ideologues and polemicists of many different shades of opinion to use new interpretations of symbols, figures and episodes from Maharashtra's history and culture to make new statements and claims about their own contemporary society. The next chapter will examine some examples of such projects to illustrate the broader ideological context in which Phule was writing.

49. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale. D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 24. In this and the reference for Footnote No. 48, Phule spells the word 'Maratha' normally. However, in other places he spells it as 'Marhathe', as in the reference for Footnote No. 14. In the debate over the ideological meaning to be attached to the terms 'Maharashtra' and 'Maratha', writers who seek to derive a meaning from their interpretation of history usually trace the etymology of the terms from any one of the possible permutations: (for example, that 'Maharashtra' is derived from maha rastra, 'great country', or 'Maratha' from maha rathi, 'great warrior') and in order to emphasise this particular meaning, spell it slightly differently from the conventional 'Maratha'. As we shall see in Chapter Ten, the writer Rajaramsastri Bhagavat does this in his account of the ancient history of the Marathas.

Chapter Ten.

Maratha history as polemic: low caste ideology and political debate in late nineteenth century Maharashtra.

1. Introduction.

A striking feature of Marathi vernacular literature towards the end of the nineteenth century lies in the sudden surge of interest in the Maratha warrior hero Sivaji, and his feats of leadership in the great expansions of Maratha power that took place in the seventeenth century. Of all the work on Sivaji written at this time, the most familiar is probably Mahadev Govind Ranade's Rise of the Maratha Power, published in 1891, in English. Besides these, there appeared in the last three decades of the century an unusually large number of Marathi works celebrating Sivaji's exploits.[1]

This upsurge of interest in Sivaji was not confined to the vernacular literature. In the same period, Sivaji was also made

1. Other examples of works on Sivaji published towards the end of the century were: Antaji Ramacandra Haradikar, The Triumph of Sivaji, Bombay 1891 (Marathi); Sitaram Narahar Dhavale, A Play about the Child Sivaji, Ratnagiri 1884 (Marathi); Kasinath Narayan Sane (ed.) Sabhasad's Life of Sivaji, Pune 1889 (Marathi) Krsnarav Arjun Keluskar The Life of Sivaji, of the Ksatriya Line Bombay 1907 (Marathi); Dattadas, Ballads on the Life and Exploits of Sivaji Nagpur 1908 (Marathi); Govind Narayan Dattar, The Life of the Chatrapati Sivaji Bombay 1906. (Marathi). Not all of these were written from the overtly polemical standpoint of the three works discussed here, but their existence is an indication of the intensity of interest in this period of Maratha history.

the focus of a number of active groups and movements. Most familiar of these is the attempt by Bal Gangadhar Tilak to make Sivaji the symbol for a mass-based nationalist movement in Maharashtra. Other groups, such as the Sivaji club in Kolhapur, active in the 1890's, tried to employ the figure of Sivaji in a variety of different political projects.[2]

2. For an account of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's attempts to make Sivaji the symbol of a popular movement, see Richard Cashman, The myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and mass politics in Maharashtra University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975, pp. 98-122. Another good account is in the collection of essays by I.M. Reisner and N.M. Goldberg (eds.) Tilak and the struggle for Indian Freedom Delhi 1966. The best account of the gradual growth of interest in Sivaji, from the revolutionary Vasudev Balavant Phadake's assumption of the title 'Sivaji the second' in 1879, to the controversy aroused by James Douglas's criticisms of the dilapidated state of Sivaji's tomb at the fort of Rayagad in his A Book of Bombay (Bombay, 1883), to the eventual successful organisation of a Sivaji Memorial Fund by Tilak in 1895, is in Anil Samarth, Shivaji and the Indian National Movement, Somaiya Publications, Bombay 1975, pp. 6-57. According to Phule's first biographer, Phule himself had visited Sivaji's tomb at the time when Douglas's work had set off intense discussion of the subject. Phule is said to have sent a letter to the Din Bandhu newspaper reporting on the tomb's dilapidated condition and recommending that it should be repaired. Phule organised a meeting of the Pune municipality in the grounds of the Hirabag building in Pune, chaired by one Caphalakar Svami, and attended by Phule's colleagues, Krsnarao Bhalekar and Narayanarao Lokhande. A 'Committee for the Restoration of Sivaji's Tomb' was formed, but foundered due to lack of funds. P.S. Patil, The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule Cikhali,1927, (Marathi) p. 108. D. Keer gives the date of this meeting as early 1885. D.Keer Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution Bombay 1974, pp. 169-170.

As the most striking feature and obvious symbol of Maharashtra's recent history and culture, the figure of Sivaji represented a strategically important area in the wider debate over Maharashtra's traditions and the role of different social groups in shaping them. This Chapter will examine three such accounts of the Sivaji period of Maharashtra's history, The first is A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, published by Jotirao Phule in 1869. The second account, published in 1889, is by a reformist Karhada Brahman, Rajaramasastri Bhagavat. Bhagavat argued that Maharashtrian society had always been distinguished by the absence of social conflict, and by its ability to synthesise the best in local and all-India religious culture into a harmonious whole, of which the achievements of Sivaji were the product. The third account, a ballad by Ekanath Annaji Josi, a Brahman conservative, published in 1887, displayed little interest in Maharashtra's local culture and religious traditions and presented Sivaji as the saviour of orthodox Hinduism from the threat of Islam. Josi's ballad also spoke against the corruption of Hindu religion by western influences in the nineteenth century. The comparison between these two and Phule's account illustrates the broader ideological context in which Phule was writing, and suggests how, at least in these individual examples, this kind of reinterpretation was seen as an activity having a clear bearing on present issues and discontents, vital in its ability to give access to loyalties and identities already existing in popular culture.[3]

3. For a fuller version of this Chapter, see R. O'Hanlon, 'Maratha history as polemic: low caste ideology and political debate in late nineteenth century Maharashtra' Modern Asian Studies, 1,17, January 1983. pp. 1-33.

2. A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale.

Phule was clearly aware of the potential for different interpretations which the Sivaji period presented, and of the danger of its appropriation by rival worldviews. In Slavery, published four years later, he warned of Brahman influence in the education of the lower castes: 'They tell them all sorts of tales about ignorant and credulous Sudra Kings like Sivaji, who freed the country from foreign unbelievers, and sought to protect cows and Brahmans, and so they fill them with false religious patriotism'.[4]

Phule did not stop with the figure of Sivaji in his attempt to recruit symbols from popular culture to the cause of the lower castes. His account of the ancient history of India formed a second dimension to the ballad. The triumphs of the desi and mavali armies of Sivaji[5] recalled the more ancient martial past of the Sudra

4. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 114-115. Phule's assignment of a Sudra status here to Sivaji is made only within the context of his more general assertion of the real Ksatriya identity of all Sudras. What is more difficult to assess is exactly what varna status would have been popularly ascribed to Sivaji in the period in which Phule was writing. As we saw in Chapter Three, this issue was certainly a very sensitive one in the 1820's and 1830's, both among elite Marathas and the Brahman guardians of Hindu orthodoxy. It is likely that this divergence of interpretation would have remained, as an aspect of the more fundamental controversy over the role and relations of these social groups in Maharashtra's history, until the public assimilation of Sivaji to the nationalist cause in the 1890's.

5. These two Marathi terms are drawn from the words des, the flat uplands of the Deccan, and maval, the rugged terrain of the Sahayadri range to the south and west of Pune. It was from these areas that Sivaji drew most of his troops in the early part of his campaigns.

Ksatriyas under King Bali, and the meaning of Sivaji's career became the inheritance of the mantle of King Bali, in the leadership of the lower castes and the protection of the land from foreign conquest. The ballad opens with an account of the battle between Bali and Parasuram:

> 'The child of the great warrior Ksatriyas
> in the third age, in the time of the Yavanas
> By nature courageous, they feared him in battle
> he fought ceaselessly for his country
> Such a great power afflicted Parasuram sorely
> twenty-one times, one after the other
> Such great warriors were called great enemies
> they made the sons of the twice-born tremble
> Denied them learning when they were defeated
> they called them maha-ari and mang
> Fearful, they took revenge of the conquered enemy
> like a snake, the son of ingratitude. [6]

In beginning his ballad on Sivaji with an account of King Bali, Phule attempts to assimilate Sivaji to a much older tradition of great non-Brahman rulers and protectors of the common man. In the short prose introduction to the work, Phule goes straight to the point as to its purpose: 'that it may be useful to the kunbis, Malis, Mangs, and Mahars, the ruined Ksatriyas'.[7] He explains that he has been careful to write it in language that will appeal to these classes: 'I have altogether avoided using great long Sanskrit words. Wherever I have been able, I have used short words just enough to convey my meaning. I have worked very hard to put it in easy language that the Malis and kunbis will understand, and to write something in a way that they will like'.[8]

6. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 6.

7. ibid, p. 7.

8. idem.

The ballad begins:

'I sing the ballad of Bhosale, the jewel of the kulavadis
Of Chatrapati Sivaji
The patron of the kumbis, he gives the sacred thread to
his caste brothers
The destroyer of the Muslims' 9

It is through the figure of Sivaji, as the representative of the older tradition of King Bali, that the kulavadis or kumbis are linked with their older identity as Ksatriyas: thus Sivaji is said to have given the 'sacred thread', the mark of Ksatriya status, to his caste brothers.

Having described the beauty of the baby Sivaji in conventional terms, Phule inserts an episode which appears to be entirely of his own creation. His mother, Jijabai, leads him into the garden, sits him down and tells him the story of their ancestors, the Ksatriyas of pre-Aryan India. The country's weakness before the Muslims is ascribed to the previous Brahman persecution of the martial races, and Sivaji's anger against the Muslims rises when he sees that this is the second time that his country has suffered in this way:

'She recalled for him the memory of his ancestors
Tears filled her eyes

The lords of the land destroyed
She told him what had happened in ancient times

Because they were living on the land they were called
Ksatriyas
On the land they lived happily' 10

9. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 9.

10. ibid., pp. 12-13.

She describes to him the great happiness of the pre-Aryan Ksatriyas, 'your forefathers', their destruction at the hands of Brahma and Parasuram, and the eventual victory of the Muslims in India. Thus Phule presents his own version of the source of Sivaji's inspiration:

> 'As his mother's teaching was impressed upon his mind,
> his rage against the Yavanas grew,
> And he made his plan to fight them' [11]

He denied that Sivaji's Brahman teacher, Ramdas, had any great influence on him:

> 'Who should be the guru of the fish that play in the water?' [12]

Phule recounts Sivaji's early exploits: the capture of the forts of Torana, Sinhagad, Purandar, Rajamaci, Lohagad and Tikona, strategic forts in the rugged terrain to the south and west of Pune. In this invocation of names, all of them a familiar part of the landscape of western Maharashtra he attempts to conjure up for his reader each part of the land itself, to endow it with a new significance, evoking the exploits of the soldier-cultivators of the country and the glories of their leader, Sivaji. Phule dwells at length on Sivaji's unequalled power:

> 'For four years there was no controlling Sivaji
> The son was devoted to his father
> He killed Candrarao More and took Javali
> He took another fort, Vasota,
> He built Pratapagad and made someone there peshwa
> He devised new titles

11. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p.14.

12. ibid., p. 15.

He sent threatening letters to those who treated
him dishonourably
He sent his men to plunder
By a back road they went quietly to Ahmadnagar
They looted elephants and horses
Fine clothes, jewels, gold coins - no price could be set
on the riches
He took the Baragir into his service
He took forts on the sea shore and started keeping boats
He took the Pathans under him'. 13

In this description of the exploits and successes of their leader, Phule invites his Sudra audience to experience the same sense of power vicariously, to assert that despite their lowly rank in the present scale of social and religious values, there had been a time when no opponent could stand before them, the memory of which should create a bitter dissatisfaction with present-day society.

Having described the famous encounter between Sivaji and Afzul Khan, the prolonged fight with Siddhi Johar, and the brave stand made by Murarji Baji Prabhu and the mavalis, Phule then inserts a short passage on the role of the divine in human affairs. As we saw in Chapter Five, the Sivaji ballad is dedicated to Ramacandra Balakrsna Jayakar, the president of the Paramahansa Mandali. The idea of the divine that Phule presents here, of a Creator essentially separate from the natural world and the social order, although he may act in the latter as Providence, is very much in keeping with the religious ideas of the Mandali, and with Phule's own earlier religious position. In the introduction to the ballad, he had

13. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe. pp.16-17. Note here Phule's deliberately off-hand reference to the first delegation of Sivaji's authority to the Brahman peshwa of the fort of Pratapgad.

described how:

> 'The Supreme Being, the Creator of the world, who watches over the whole world and who gives wisdom to all, felt pity for us poor Sudras, so he made his most beloved children, the English, into rulers, and sent them to India to free us Ksatriyas from the snares of the Brahman devils'. 14

Phule continues with this theme and presents a view of the divine nature in keeping with his more general ideological position:

> 'The first and eternal one; the cause of all
> Life and death; he gives sustenance
> Only he can save; only he can strike down
> He watches over everything; the cause of all movement
> Constant care; he gives direction
> I will look into the past; I will reflect in my mind
> Pronouncing the name, the life of the world
> Keep your balance and seek
> Understand the meaning and cut your bonds'. 15

Phule does not use the figure of Sivaji to enjoin the protection of the particular religious form of Hinduism in the way that more conventional writers also examined here employ him. As the basis of man's religious life, Phule puts forward the diametrically opposite idea of a unitary deity who, in his power and justice, transcends all human social and religious arrangements. His justice manifests itself as Providence in human affairs, but he is immeasureably removed from them. Besides his great majesty and power, particular human religious arrangements appear arbitrary and insignificant, the products of self-interest or delusion. Moreover, the very freedom which this distance between the divine and the

14. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 7.

15. ibid., p. 21.

merely social order allows to the human individual, acts as an injunction upon him to use his powers of reason and rational criticism to reconstruct his social world. This freedom is conditioned only by the justice inherent in the divine nature. In the last four lines of the passage, the poet urges his audience to reflect upon their own condition, to look into the past - the view of the past which Phule had presented earlier in the ballad - and to cut the bonds of the present.

Throughout the ballad, Phule prefers to emphasise Sivaji as the man of action, the leader of the desis and mavalis, rather than as the wise statesman and administrator, deliberating with his Brahman counsellors. He makes great play with the daring escape of Sivaji and his son from Delhi:

> 'The Mughal thought that Sivaji had lost hope
> He congratulated himself
> The father and son lie in the baskets instead
> of the bread
> The rest they leave to the servants
> Making haste the servants take the baskets
> They do the marvellous deed at night
> They leave Delhi and set Sivaji free
> They carried out the plan
> In the morning the Mughal gnashed his teeth
> He sent the Majam after him
> He outwitted Aurangzeb; he took to horseback with
> his son
> He put his son in front; he pretended to be a gosavi
> They turned night into day; they reached Raigad
> He bowed at his mother's feet'. 16

16. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 29-30.

Phule runs through the other standard episodes of Sivaji's career: the assault on Sinhagad with Tanaji Malusre; the second sack of Surat; the levy of cauth in Khandesh; the exploits of Gujar and Moroba Pathan; the defeat of the next Muslim commander sent against him, Khan Jehan. In all of these Phule emphasises the bravery of the men of Sivaji's army and the latter's skill as a warrior, and the great power wielded by them together.

The 'meaning' of Sivaji's career for Phule, then does not lie in any direct formula, such as the protection of the symbols of conventional Hindu religion - the cow and the Brahman - from the Muslims, or the establishment of an independent Hindu empire. Instead he uses Sivaji's career as a vehicle to convey an idea of the glorious martial past of the lower castes of western Maharashtra. This in turn recalls the more ancient martial past of the Sudra Ksatriyas under King Bali, so that the Muslim invasion appears not primarily as a threat to the Hindu religion, but as a repetition of a previous invasion by an alien social and religious power. Phule draws all this together most effectively in the song sung by Sivaji's followers at his death, which combines a powerful emotional appeal with the most precise polemic:

'Speak to us, Maharaj, why do you not speak
With your companions, your mavali troops, you waged war freely
You suffered heat and thirst; you had no fear of the rain
You wandered the hills and valleys; you brought the Yavana to his knees
You plundered many lands; you made our race great
With deep wisdom you fought; performed marvellous deeds on the earth
Although you gathered riches, you spent them wisely
You shared them with your soldiers - you had no love for wealth
Clever and attentive, you foreswore idleness
The small and the great troops - you never forgot them
King first among the Ksetriyas (the Sudras of the Deccan) you were without equal'.17

Phule emphasises Sivaji's concern with the tillers of the soil, the parallel to Maharashtra's martial tradition:

'He gave life to the peasants
He did not deprive the cultivators of their happiness;
He passed new regulations
Both great and small have redress
No one suffered oppression'. 18

Phule fuses a sense of celebration at Sivaji's marvellous exploits, his identification with the common man, the soldier and the tiller of the soil, and the vision of this same common man as the original master of the land. It is a cry from the heart of the leaderless Sudra of the present, in protest at the contrast between the greatness he had once known and his present rank as the servant of the other three varnas.

From the identification with the tradition of King Bali, Phule passes to a direct description of the tyranny of the Brahmans

17. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p.37.

18. idem.

in the present, appealing to the figurehead of British power:

> 'Oh Queen, you have the power; Hindusthan is asleep
> Everywhere, there is the rule of the Brahmans;
> open your eyes and see
> In the small villages, the kulkarnis are the masters of
> the pen
> In the provinces they hold great offices; thus they have
> high authority
> Like Yama, the mamledar gives the Sudras ceaseless punish-
> ment
> The poor foolish collector stands before the cunning Citnis
> How great is the authority of the Brahmans in the revenue
> departments
> The Bhats are everywhere; the kunbis have no redress
> Joti says, we run for help; deliver us from these evils'.19

A short review of Phule's ballad appeared in the literary journal Vividhadnyan Vistar, to which Phule had evidently sent a copy:

> 'The ballad on Raja Chatrapati Sivaji. A copy of this has come to us. The author is some Mr. Jotirao Govindrao Phule or other. When we read this work we thought that to accept it would bring sheer disgrace upon the great and courageous Sivaji, and upon all Hindu people. We have no idea of the author's address, so we are afraid we are unable to send it back to him'. 20

2. Rajaramasastri Bhagavat: the community of Maharashtra.

It was not until the end of the 1870's that the interpretation of Sivaji's career for contemporary ideological purposes really gathered momentum, which makes comparison with Phule's work, published in 1869, somewhat difficult. In 1871, Ramacandra Bhikaji

19. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 38.

20. Vividhadnyan Vistar, July 1869. (Marathi). A full series of this periodical is available in the Jayakar Library, University of Pune.

Gunjikar published his Mocangad, a historical novel set in Sivaji's time, but which is centred around a series of fictitious charachers in one of the hill forts of the Deccan. In 1873, Ganesa Sastri Lele published a life of Sivaji in verse, which was followed by one in 1874 by Kesav Laksman Joravekar.[21] But the pieces which present the most illuminating contrasts to Phule's work are published slightly later, when the figure of Sivaji was beginning to be taken up as a symbol of the independence of Maharashtra and of Hindus more generally.

Rajaramasastri Bhagavat was a prolific essayist, much of his work published in the Vividhadnyan Vistar, which had rejected Phule's ballad with such adverse comment. Bhagavat combined the career of a Professor of Sanskrit at St. Xavier's College, Bombay, with that of an active social reformer.[22] He was greatly concerned with the condition of the lower castes, questioning the division of society on the basis of birth. He advocated interdining and intermarriage. He presents an interesting contrast with Phule because he combined this social reformism with a view of the history and culture of Maharashtra which Phule would almost certainly have rejected. Bhagavat expressed his interpretation of Maharashtra's history and society in two works apart from his life of Sivaji: The dharma of

21. R.B. Gunjikar, Mocangad, Pune 1871 (Marathi); Ganesa Sastri Lele, The Life of Sivaji, Bombay 1873 (Marathi) and Kesav Laksman Joravekar, The Sports of Sivaji, Bombay 1874, (Marathi). For a general account of the development of Marathi literature in this period, see Ian Raeside, 'Early Prose Fiction in Marathi' in T.W. Clark The Novel in India. Allen and Unwin, London 1970, pp. 75-101.

22. For an account of his life, see Durga Bhagavat, Rajaramasastri Bhagavat. Bombay 1947. (Marathi).

Maharashtra, published in 1895, and A few Words about the Marathas, published in 1887. This view stressed the harmony and co-operation which existed between all castes in Mararashtra, and was indeed the defining quality of its culture, responsible for its periods of greatness. Bhagavat also asserted the existence of a pool of common social and religious culture, the integration of the all-India worldview of Hinduism into a distinctive local religious tradition, largely through the work of the saint poets. He expressed the idea of this pool of common culture, which transcended the boundaries of caste, in the term Maharashtramandal, the community of Maharashtra. This combination of a moderate social reformism with the assertion of a national identity deriving from the idea of a local community united in its political and religious traditions, represented a fairly common set of opinions among moderate politicians in the 1880's.[23]

Bhagavat argued that the period of history under Sivaji represented the second rise to pre-eminence of the Marathas, the first having taken place under the Jadhavas in medieval Maharashtra. He emphasised the role of Brahmans as religious advisers, citing the

23. The most notable example of this kind of moderate social reformist combined with pride in local tradition was, of course, the work of M.G. Ranade. In his work Rise of the Maratha Power (Bombay 1900), he argued that the rise of the Maratha power represented a genuine effort on the part of a Hindu nationality to achieve 'a Confederacy of States animated by a common patriotism'.This sense of unity derived from the social and religious culture that was shared by all classes in Maharashtra. The best single biography of M.G. Ranade is still N.R. Phatak, The Life of Mahadev Govind Ranade, Pune 1966 (Marathi).

influence of Mukundraj, and the absence of caste divisions: 'At that time, neither the Brahmans nor the non-Brahmans among the Marathas paid any attention whatsoever to the divisions of caste, but were concerned only for the good of the community, celebrating their own name with that of the community of Maharashtra'.[24] He emphasises the religious unity of all the Marathas, expressed in the writings of the saint poets, who saw God as everywhere the same, and had no regard for social barriers. There was little division between Brahmans and Ksatriyas, as even Brahmans sometimes took up the sword: 'In short, all Marathas of every caste put their best foot forward in matters of politics, religion and the affairs of the home, and movements of every kind started among the community of Maharashtra'.[25]

The second great period of Maharashtra's prosperity came with the rise of Sivaji. The strength of feeling for unity among all Marathas was revealed in the co-operation between the Marathas and the Muslims of Hyderabad. This quality of 'Maharashtra-ness' existed as the very opposite of feelings of caste or religious division:

> 'If Islamic feeling among the men of the Nizam's state grew, still the quality of Maharashtra-ness was contained in them, and their minds were drawn to the Hindu Marathas. The strength of this quality grew greater, and with generous minds they paid no attention to divisions of religion, and gave their support to their countrymen'. [26]

24. Rajaramasastri Bhagavat, The Life of Sivaji, Bombay 1889, p. 8.

25. ibid., p.9.

26. ibid., pp. 14-15.

For Bhagavat, the idea of the integrity of local culture took precedence over attachment to the all-India religious tradition. But this local culture had its own distinctive religious tradition, loyalty to which took precedence once that was threatened: 'Just as Ekanathsvami started a great religious movement among the community of Maharashtra, so Sivaji started a great political movement, and in the end once more established the kingdom of the Marathas, freeing his brothers in language, country and religion from the tyranny of the Muslims'.[27]

Bhagavat described the encounter between Dilir Khan and Murarji Baji Prabhu during the seige of Purandar, and the marvellous courage of the latter in storming the Khan's camp with a handful of mavalis:

> 'Why should it surprise us that Dilir Khan paused for a moment to wonder at the courage of this boundless devotion to Sivaji and to the land of his birth, in this great example to his countrymen? If you are looking for examples of the resolution, strength and enthusiasm of the people of the community of Maharashtra - both Brahmans and non-Brahmans - then you should look at this picture from the history of the Marathas'. [28]

He praised the stand made by this Baji Prabhu's caste-fellow, Baji Prabhu Pasalakar, against the forces of Siddhi Johar near Panhala: 'It is an honour worthy of being cherished by every Maharashtrian that men like this Baji, a gem of a hero, have been born from the womb of Mother Maharashtra'.[29]

27. Rajaramasastri Bhagavat, The Life of Sivaji, Bombay 1889 p. 19.

28. ibid., p. 34.

29. ibid., p. 41.

Here, Bhagavat's idea of a united Maharashtra, with its own identity representing an ideal of service and loyalty to the community, has much in common with Phule's depiction of a local community united against an external enemy. But the social constitution of the two communities is quite different: for Phule, the Marathas are strictly the community of the non-Brahman castes, while Bhagavat regards Marathas as those who are 'brothers in language, country and religion'. Bhagavat sees Hindu religion not as some remote, supra-local worldview imposed by an alien power, but as a central element in the community, integrated into its religious life to form a distinctive local tradition. Phule denies the existence of any such integration between Brahmanic religion and popular culture, indeed ascribes to the former the alien and coercive role that in Bhagavat's view is given to Islam.

Bhagavat placed Sivaji's Brahman advisers at the centre of the community of Maharashtra. He described Raghunath Hanamante, the erstwhile Brahman regent of Sivaji's younger brother Venkaji, who resigned after his embezzlement of public funds was discovered and who joined Sivaji's court, promising to help him claim his lawful share of the patrimony left by Sivaji's father: 'We Brahmans among the community of Maharashtra should cherish it as a great honour that there were in previous times among us many Brahmans like Raghunath, who cared for the welfare of their own people and their own masters; even now, a few of the still shine forth'.[30]

30. Rajaramasastri Bhagavat, The Life of Sivaji, Bombay 1889 p. 53.

Here, then it is possible to see how this account of Sivaji might form part of the worldview of a reformist Brahman with a strong pride in local Maharashtrian tradition. Besides their simultaneous declarations of loyalty to quite divergent ideas of the local community, another significant point of comparison between Phule's work and Bhagavat's lies in the way in which both move in dialectical fashion between the local and the all-India level of political and religious identity. Both conflate the two for their different ideological purposes. While Phule identifies the tradition of pre-Aryan Ksatriyas with that of India itself, and so places himself on the all-India level on which he confronts Brahmanic Hinduism, so Bhagavat, like other writers using the figure of Sivaji to assert a national identity, employs him as a kind of shorthand for the potential existence of a more general national Hindu identity in the face of British rule.

3. Ekanath Annaji Josi: Sivaji, protector of Hindu religion.

Josi published his work The advice given to Maharaja Sivaji by Dadoji Kondadev[31] in 1877. It is concerned above all with the violation of the Hindu religion committed by the Muslims, and with Sivaji's role as its protector. It emphasised the all-India tradition of Hinduism, as against any integration of that tradition with

31. Dadoji Kondadev was the Brahman governor of Pune district appointed by Sivaji's father, Sahaji. As the latter's factor, he was supposed always to have been very timid about Sivaji's schemes of expansion, but on his deathbed gave his blessing to the re-establishment of an independent Hindu power.

the local culture of Maharashtra. This may well be the piece to which Phule himself refers in his letter to Mama Paramanand of 2 June 1886. Having complained that most English historians had not properly appreciated the real conditions of the Sudras and ati-Sudras because they had relied on the books and the verbal accounts of Brahmans, he says:

> 'And nowadays some learned Brahman youngsters are making up new ballads and have slowly brought them out into the open. I have also seen many of them, but I have not made a collection of them because many present an account in which Dadoji Kondadev, with his cows and Brahmans, take all the credit which was earned by the Sudras.' 32

In the introduction to the poem, we are told that it had been sent to the Daksina Prize Fund committee, who had accepted it and given the author fifty rupees; Phule's own work had earlier been turned down by the committee. Josi was an assistant school master at the English school at Indore. He does not appear to have had a notable career as an active politician, but took a prominent part in Indore's sabha for the study of local history.[33] But the poem itself, both in form and content, seems to express a coherent view of Indian history and the Hindu religion, which forms a perfect contrast to that given by Phule. While Phule sets out his determ-

32. Jotirao Phule to Mama Paramanand, 2 June 1886, reprinted in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 325. This appears to be one of the very few letters of Phule's, apart from those written to newspapers, that have survived. Narayanrao Paramanand was an influential social reformer active in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

33. G.C. Bhate, A History of Modern Marathi Literature, 1880-1938, Pune 1939, p.228. See also the introduction to the poem, which mentions the part that Josi took in a society for the study of history in Indore.

ination to avoid long Sanskrit words, and to make his poem comprehensible to the most unlettered reader, Josi's piece is highly Sanskritised; it is written in sloka and Josi seems to model himself on eighteenth century writers such as Muktesvara in the intricate and ornate style of his Marathi.[34]

The poem itself consists of a lengthy piece of exhortation, by Dadoji Kondadev to Sivaji, to rescue India and the Hindu religion from the depredations of the Muslims. It represents the worldview of an orthodox Brahman, with an intense pride in social and religious tradition, on several different levels. One of Josi's main devices is to contrast the India of Sivaji's time, humiliated and impoverished by foreign rule, with the familiar idea of a golden age of Hindu India, in which the gods were properly respected, when great sages and rsis guided men in the truths of religion, where ascetics performed great feats in penance, where cows and Brahmans were held in proper reverence and ordinary men did not desert the path of their dharma, where great leaders arose in times of danger, and the land itself prospered. This idea of the golden age of Hindus in India, in which the people were governed in equity and goodness, and protected from all enemies, forms an idealised picture in popular Hindu thought more generally, expressed in the familiar term, Ramaraj, 'the

34. Muktesvara was one of the eighteenth century pandit poets, writing puranic stories in highly Sanskritised Marathi.

kingdom of Rama'.[35] Although the idea of Ramaraj connotes a rule of justice and prosperity for all, it is, of course, a highly conditional one - it is justice and prosperity in the terms of orthodox Hindu religion. Ramaraj, the ideal society from the point of view of the orthodox Hindu, which Josi invokes in a typical form, may be compared with Phule's kingdom of Bali. Phule sets up just such a golden age in the idea of Bali's kingdom, Baliraj, but the society which he describes is the very negation of Ramaraj. All that is most cherished in the latter is seen as the enemy, the destroyer of what was the true golden age of India, in which the guiding principle of men's lives was their identification with the land and their determination to protect it as a community under the leadership of Bali and the Khandobas. Here then, it is possible to see another level on which Phule attempted to provide a substitute, based on popular religious culture, for the categories of thought of conventional Hinduism. Instead of yearning for the lost age of Ramaraj, and casting his thought in the idiom of orthodox Hinduism, the reader of Phule's work could free himself from these categories and envisage the golden age in the terms given by Phule.

The political content of Josi's work also provides a contrast with that of Phule. As in the case of Bhagavat, the political

35. Molesworth describes the popular conception of Ramaraj: 'A term for a kingdom in which the people are protected from all enemies and are governed in equity and goodness'. Molesworth's Marathi Dictionary, p. 694. The term refers, of course, to the rule of Rama described in the Ramayana. It still has significance in the twentieth century Maharashtra. Thus the Rama Raja Parisad, a right-wing Hindu communalist party founded in 1948, campaigned for a return to the rectitude of the age of Rama.

purposes of Josi's poem always remain implicit. But it would have been difficult, in the context of British rule and all the controversies about the subversion of Hinduism that had accompanied it from the early part of the century, to read Josi's invective against foreign rule and the corruption of the Hindu religion without making some comparisons between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth. Josi's piece uses the figure of Sivaji to inveigh against the corruption of Hinduism and the humiliation and impoverishment of India from whatever source, whether Muslim or British. He assimilates the figures of Sivaji and Dadoji Kondadev to this defence of Hindu tradition. Sivaji he presents in the very terms which Phule most condemns, as the defender of cows and Brahmans, the symbols of orthodox Hinduism. He regards Brahmans as the main source of influence behind Sivaji's decision to found an independent base from which to challenge Muslim power. Finally, an interesting point of comparison between all three pieces examined here may be made, with reference to their attitudes to local and to all-India traditions. As we have seen, both Phule and Bhagavat have, in their different ways, a great regard for the local religious traditions and social structures; Phule, because his perception of a local social and religious culture that specifically excludes Brahmans forms the material for his constitution of a community of the oppressed, indeed conditions the credibility of his more general argument; and Bhagavat, because his perception of a local social and religious community into which has been integrated the best aspects of all-India Hinduism, forms the basis for his intense admiration for Maharashtra and the Marathas.

Josi, on the other hand, has very little concern for the local tradition as such. For him, the figure of Sivaji is merely a vehicle through which the cause of a supra-local Hindu tradition may be advocated. Sivaji is assimilated directly to the traditions of classical Hindu mythology, in which the gods have appeared on earth in the form of great heroes to rescue India from some grave danger; Sivaji is presented as the latest in the line of great Ksatriya heroes, (here of course, the term is used in its conventional sense), to which had belonged Rama, Bharata, Bhisma, Bhima, Balaram and Krsna.

In Josi's piece, The Advice of Dadoji Kondadev to Maharaja Sivaji, having described the exploits of Sivaji's grandfather and father in the struggle against the Muslims, Dadoji tells Sivaji of the blessings of independence, the very life-blood of any country. It adorns a country, he says, like the jewel Kaustubh adorned the neck of Krsna. He compares independence to the water that makes a tree grow, and an enemy to the heat that dries it up, and exhorts Sivaji to take whatever action is necessary to defend the country. All this is by way of preliminary to a description of the former greatness of India.

'As the Ganges is amongst rivers, so she was the greatest
of them all
Filled with a great store of happiness;

How great the light of her learning, her talents,
her fortune
How great her trade and industry, her desire for commerce
Do I have to tell you all this? In this high position,
all sorts of progress
Had been achieved; there was nothing less than greatness
anywhere.

How great were the exploits of her Kings
Always righteousness in justice, religion and the protection
of the weak
The mere mention of whose name was enough to fill the mind
with reverence.' 36

But Josi makes it quite clear that these virtues are highly particular ones, identifying the greatness of India with the literary and cultural achievements of classical Hinduism. This was the land in which Manu had related the true principles of dharma to the people, in which Valmiki had narrated the Ramayan, in which the Mahabharata and the puranas had been conceived; in which ascetics had carried out great feats of endurence, with the thought only of Brahma in their minds; the land in which great rsis devoted to karma had lived, and virtuous Brahman priests who had done sacrifices to achieve moksa, or freedom from the cycle of human rebirths; the land in which the great kings of the Raghav family, Rama and Yudhisthira, had ruled and carried out the asvamedha horse sacrifice to show the extent of their dominions; the land where Vikram and the poets had flourished, a land filled with beautiful temples, as if Mount Meru itself had taken on different shapes; this was the place where the name of

36. Ekanath Annaji Josi, The Advice of Dadoji Kondadev to Maharaja Sivaji, Bombay 1877 (Marathi), p. 13.

Hari was on every man's lips, and each was fixed in his proper dharma: the people, he concludes, were as if floating on a sea of happiness.[37]

Through the medium of Dadoji's advice, Josi then turns to the condition to which the country has been brought by foreign rule. He describes how the people wander here and there like flocks of sheep, without guidance or protection, harrassed and tormented by the Muslims, stripped of their wealth and filled with fear. He compares it to the sufferings of the earth described in the puranas:

> 'As it happened before in the puranas, when demons were everywhere
> We now see before us in this very country, with our own eyes! ' [38]

Significantly, Josi here takes as his examples of the demons that troubled the gods, some of the figures which Phule himself had described as the original leaders of the Ksatriyas - the Daitya kings, Hiranyaksa and his brother - and the raksas king, Ravana. Here then we see the conventions of the orthodox tradition for which Phule is trying to create an alternative. However, Dadoji continues, he has yet to tell the worst:

> 'When there were rakshas and Daityas, there was at least this,
> That no one actually corrupted their own religion; though there was a shower of troubles,
> Still everyone worshipped their own gods and obtained favour
> In those days there was no place for the corruption of religion' [39]

37. Ekanath Annaji Josi, The Advice of Dadoji Kondadev to Maharaja Sivaji, Bombay 1877, pp. 15-16.

38. ibid., p. 16.

39. ibid., p. 17.

But now, Dadoji laments, the Hindu religion itself had fallen victim to pollution by other faiths; and it is hard here to escape the feeling that Josi does not just mean Islam. He relates how, where there were once temples, now appear the tombs of Muslim pirs; the Koran is read in place of the Vedas; people talk of Allah where once they talked of Narayan; where once the auspicious palkhis of the gods had been carried in procession, now appeared the taje in the processions of Muharram. At Somnath, at Kasi and Ujjain, and in Orissa, the Muslims had smashed idols and destroyed the glory of the god. He asks Sivaji:

> 'Do I have to tell you all their crimes against religion,
> one by one?
> I cannot bear to talk of these terrible deeds. 40

From the state of religion, he turns his attention to the condition of the people. Clad only in rags, with a rude hut for shelter, the farmer sweats labouring in the hot season; he endures the wind and the rain, he cares for the crops and the fields in the hope that his family will enjoy the fruits of his labours. But then the Yavana strikes, his crops are destroyed and his trade ruined. If this goes on, Dadoji says, not even the name of the Hindus will remain.[41] Then, in a passage which could hardly help but point to the presence of the British power, Dadoji inveighs against the imposition of foreign power:

40. Ekanath Annaji Josi, The Advice of Dadoji Konadev to Maharaja Sivaji, Bombay 1877. p. 21.

41. ibid., pp. 21-22.

'Why should we support them, whose name and country
are unknown to us?
Why should they rule over us, uninvited?
Tear up their power by the roots and drive them out
Make it as though this suffering had never existed'. 42

In his most explicit attempt to assimilate Sivaji to the tradition of great heroes of classical Hindu literature, Josi describes Sivaji as another incarnation of Visnu. Having lamented the passivity of the people, Dadoji urges Sivaji to take up the leadership:

'Take up the command yourself, Oh King, become their
leader
Take up your spear and drive them out
Whenever some difficulty has come upon this land, the
merciful Lord
Has always devised some remedy and come to our rescue

When the country was overrun by many demons, then quickly
the Lord
Took incarnation in the Raghav family and destroyed them
all.
Like the demons, the foreign unbelievers have now spread
over the country
It seems to me, Oh King, that the Lord has planned you
to kill them

When the Daityas overran the land the Lord
Took incarnation as Narasinha, destroyed their pride
and killed them.
So the Lord has taken on the form of you, and like the
Daityas 43
Now uproots these foreign unbelievers and destroys them'.

Again, it is possible to see the conventional literary tradition for which Phule has attempted to provide an alternative. Narasinha, whom Phule had depicted as an enemy of the Sudras, here appears as the incarnation of Visnu, the Daityas as the enemies of the gods.

42. Ekanath Annaji Josi, The Advice of Dadoji Kondadev to Maharaja Sivaji, Bombay 1877. p. 25.

43. ibid., p. 27.

In the final passage, it is possible to see the way in which this identification with the literature of all-India Hinduism is connected with the political worldview of a Brahman like Josi, an early nationalist with a western education and a history of involvement in his local student sabha. Here, the connection between the religious conservatism of such a worldview, and its ability to assimilate new forms of political activity helps explain, perhaps, Phule's sense of the threat that this combination of old and new forms of social power posed for the future of non-Brahmans. Dadoji encourages Sivaji to gather conferences of the people, hold meetings and discussions with them, and convince them of the need for collective action. Here, it does not seem to me too far-fetched to see, in the language of Dadoji's advice, the political idiom of early moderate nationalist ideology, with its emphasis on the leadership and education of the larger masses of Hindu society into a greater political consciousness:

> 'You should go to every village, town and city
> Wander day and night, gather all the people there together
> Hold great conferences, and all this sorrow, this great disaster
> This hatred, this greed, this torment, this cruelty
>
> All these great difficulties; hold discussions about them
> Give lectures, make the ordinary people understand
> Young and old should know that we are much hindered
> Make them understand that we need some way out of this disaster
>
> Fill the hearts of all with patriotism
> Bring everyone into battle to fight for the freedom of their country,
> Bring out the mavalis, like bulls in their strength
> Then take the brave desis, foremost in strength and courage.

'You should rouse up the palegars, prepare the sansthaniks,
The desais, the brave desmukhs, the despandes,
The killedars, the naiks, the invincible keepers of forts,
Direct them all and create a mighty and fearless
assembly.' 44

This, it seems to me, might well be compared with the emphasis which M.G. Ranade places upon the orderly and structured exercise of power in the Maratha state: the deliberation in councils and assemblies between Sivaji and his Brahman advisers, the consultations between Sivaji and the lesser Maratha chiefs, the involvement of the masses of the people.[45] Although the two writers would not, perhaps, agree about what was most worth defending within the Hindu religious tradition - in this respect, Ranade was possibly closer to Bhagavat in perceiving an integrated political and religious culture in Maharashtra - there is the same spectrum of interlinked concerns, and the assumption of the same position in relation to the old and new cultural forces that were dominant in shaping society and religion. Both take up the cause of some aspect of popular or conventional Hindu religiosity; both perceive this from the position of a Brahman with a western as well as a traditional education, sympathetic to the idea of a national identity, and concerned to produce a viable ideology for the integration of the masses of the people into a unitary and religious identity.

44. Ekanath Annaji Josi, The Advice of Dadoji Kondadev to Maharaja Sivaji. Bombay 1877, p. 29.

45. M.G. Ranade, Rise of the Maratha Power, September 1974, pp. 52-64. Edition in the series 'Classics of Indian History and Economics', Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

As Brahmans, they belong to a social group traditionally the guardians and interpreters of one of the dominant cultural forces at work in Indian society - conventional Hinduism. What is perhaps less obvious, and well-illustrated in this example, is that it was this mediating position, stemming from a hereditary association with literacy and learning, that provided the traditional model or paradigm for the new role of such high caste groups as the mediators between some of the new political and administrative structures associated with British rule, and the larger masses in western Indian society governed by these structures. It was for this model or paradigm that Phule's Sivaji ballad attempted to create an alternative. It assimilated this central episode of Maharashtra's history to the much longer tradition of social leadership by the Maratha-kunbi caste grouping. In this group were united the two activities that had shaped and informed the development of Maharashtra's culture: the physical labour of cultivating the soil and providing for the support of the rest of society, and the tradition of the warrior and protector of the land and those that lived on it. These traditions were symbolised in the figures of King Bali and Sivaji. In this way, Phule hoped to provide for a potential following a tradition of social leadership with its own distinctive style and purpose, that would stand as an ideological rival to what he saw as Brahman-centred interpretations of culture and models of social leadership.

Chapter Eleven.

Justice and community in a hierarchical society: social protest and the construction of a religious ethic.

1. Introduction.

The projection of a collective identity for the community of the lower castes, based on the imposition of new meanings upon key symbols and episodes in Maharashtra's history and culture, formed only one area of Phule's endeavour to provide an ideological basis for the rejection of traditional Hindu beliefs and the social hierarchies associated with them. This and the following Chapter will examine his prescriptions for the more immediate situation of the lower caste community in contemporary society, as these are set out in his major works of the same period, 1869 to 1873, beginning with his attempt to construct an ethical basis for a reform of the relations between the individual and his society.

Chapter Four noted the absence in traditional Hindu thought, relative to ideas that had developed within the European Christian tradition, of the concept of an original human equality, the reflection of all men's origins at the hands of their Maker, that might give rise to a universally valid social ethic.[1] As Max

1. See pp. 89-90.

Weber argued, the ethical systems of Hinduism related to the doctrine of karma:

> 'The doctrine of karma, deduced from the principle of compensation for previous deeds of the world, not only explained the caste organisation, but the rank order of divine, human and animal beings of all degrees. Hence, it provided for the co-existence of different ethical codes for different status groups which not only differed widely, but were often in sharp conflict'. 2

This absence of any idea of a 'natural' order amongst men, in contrast to the humanly contrived order of society, meant that there developed nowhere within the speculative traditions of Hindu philosophy a tradition of rationalistic social criticism, with the notion of 'human rights', based on the abstract idea of natural law, such as there developed within the intellectual traditions of Europe from the seventeenth century. Finally, Hinduism's devaluation of this-worldly life, together with the idea, in the doctrine of karma, that the structure of present society represented the final realisation of a religious justice inherent in the social processes themselves, meant that there was no sense in which the individual could look upon the social order as an arena for the potential realisation of religious values whose source was an extra-worldly God. The individual's activity should rather take the form of a search for release from all worldly existence.

2. Max Weber, The Religion of India, Free Press, New York. 1958, p. 144.

Phule attempted to set out ways in which these traditional attitudes and values might be superseded. Central to his scheme was the uncompromising claim of a pre-social human identity, deriving from the purposes of an extra-worldly Creator. This opened the way for a concept of natural human rights as an ethic not only valid for all societies, but positively enjoined upon them as one of the most important goals both for individual and collective action. In place of the extreme social conservatism of orthodox Hinduism, Phule substituted a prescription for social radicalism which took its legitimacy from the purposes of God in the creation of man and the world.

2. The idea of human rights.

Phule's ideas about the nature of the divine have been located within a spectrum of religious radical opinion amongst small bodies of religious reformers whose position could be broadly defined as deist. They believed in one God, and saw religious duty as the service of their fellow men. They rejected all religious revelation as incompatible with reason, and substituted nature and its laws as the source of man's knowledge about God. In the emphasis on nature in the place of inherited or prescribed doctrines as the source of moral law, their ideas contained a strong abstract notion of the pre-social equality of all men. The opinions of these reformers had in turn been shaped by the interaction between the ideas of European religious radicalism and the missionary agency

of protestant Christianity.[3]

In his work The Third Eye, we saw how Phule built his scheme around the idea of an extra-worldly God, active in human affairs in the shape of Providence in his concern for justice in the human social order.[4] In Slavery, he developed his notion of the relationship between God, the human community and the individual, to emphasise much more the significance of the natural equality among men that arose from their common origin, and from the intention of God that all should enjoy equally the fruits of his creation. In developing this idea of natural rights, Phule drew heavily on the work of Thomas Paine, whose work was very popular in the radical circles in which he moved. He thus drew indirectly on the much longer tradition of natural rights thought, of which Paine's own work was a part.

Before looking at Phule's debt to Thomas Paine, it will be useful to examine first the kinds of terms that he used to describe the divine being, to suggest his relations with the created world and to distinguish him from Hindu notions of a father-god. In the Marathi introduction to the work Slavery, he refers to God as 'the all-powerful Paramasvara, the creator of all the world' and 'the Paramesvara who rules the whole world and who sees all'.[5] He

3. See pp. 64-78.

4. See pp. 182-183.

5. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 83 and p. 85. The word paramesvara means 'the greatest God', and derives from the two terms parama, 'the greatest' and isvara, a general term for God.

finishes the introduction with a prayer to the jaganiyanta, 'the ordainer and disposer of the world,' that the British government should root out the Brahman element in its rule and free the Sudras from mental slavery.[6]

Notions of a father-god can, of course, be found in different parts of the Hindu tradition: the idea of a prime mover, a deity who was before all worlds, and who exists as the ultimate godhead behind the profusion of his local and particular manifestations. Weber, indeed, described how 'below the circles of philosophically-schooled Brahmanical intellectuals, in fact in their very midst, there always reappeared in some form a supreme, personal-creator God over and above the crowd of local and functional deities - the ekantika dharma - (we would say "monotheism").[7] Varieties of such monotheism had always existed: while very early ideas of the creator of the world as a personal god, prajapati, were replaced by the principle of an impersonal Brahman, this principle itself came to be identified with a personal, extra-worldly god, Brahma. Significantly, Weber ascribed this persistence of monotheistic ideas, alongside the more esoteric varieties of philosophical thought, to a priestly concession to lay needs; in strictly logical terms, the idea of a supreme personal deity was completely at odds with a belief in karma.[8]

6. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G.Malshe, p. 92.
7. Max Weber, op. cit., p. 168.
8. ibid., p. 173.

Although Phule uses conventional terms for the supreme deity, such as 'Paramesvara', he is at pains to distinguish his own from traditional Hindu notions. Here, his identification of God as the origin of all moral law, and of nature as the source of man's knowledge of it, recall both the missionary arguments outlined in Chapter Four[9] and the deist or religious radical devaluation of the institutions of established religion in favour of forms of worship and ideas of duty prompted by man's natural reason. In the English introduction to Slavery, he protests against the conventional Hindu descriptions of the supreme god:

> 'Innumerable Bhut writers, with the self-same objects as those of Menu and others of his class, added from time to time to the existing mass of legends, the idle phantasies of their own brains, and palmed them off upon the ignorant masses as of divine inspiration, or as the acts of the Deity himself. The most immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds have been attributed to that Being who is our Creator, Governor and Protector, and who is all Holiness himself'. 10.

He criticises especially the identification of the god Visnu, and his incarnation in Parasuram, with the supreme god:

> 'It is very surprising that today the Brahmans have induced the Sudras and ati-Sudras to regard Parasuram, the main leader of the Brahmans, as the all-powerful Paramesvara, the Creator of all the world, when he murdered thousands of the Ksatriya people, and cast their women and children down into the most pitiable condition'. 11

9. See pp. 90-92 and 100-104.

10. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p.77.

11. ibid., p. 89.

In Chapter Four, we saw how the work of Thomas Paine and other European deists and religious radicals provided Phule and his friends with an important source of new ideas about the nature of the divine. Their work also helped in developing Phule's argument that all men possessed certain natural and inalienable rights, whose realisation in the social order was one of the first duties of a just society, rights which would always exist as a moral imperative no matter how much they were neglected or trampled upon in practice. Paine's own work, less important for its originality as for its clear synthesis and statement of radical ideas already in circulation to new popular audiences, was the clear product of two distinct traditions in European thought.[12] The first focussed on the idea of natural rights, and developed as a part of the intellectual background of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, first given systematic expression in John Locke's Reflections on Civil Government.[13] Until the French

12. For an account of the formation of Thomas Paine's ideas, see Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America, Oxford University Press 1976, pp. 1-17; and R.R. Fennessy, o.f.m. Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1963, pp. 12-36, and Henry Collins (ed.) Thomas Paine, The Rights of Man, Penguin Books, 1977, pp.9-47. A very good discussion of the English radical tradition to which Paine belonged, is in A. Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: the English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution, Hutchinson, London 1979, especially pp. 32-64 for the English radical tradition in the eighteenth century, and pp. 171-207 for Paine and English politics in the early 1790's.

13. For the development of natural rights ideas in England, see Paul E. Sigmund, Natural Law in Political Thought, Winthrop Publishers, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, especially pp. 74-90 on the ideas of Richard Hooker, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, and pp. 119-133 for the question of ideas of natural law in Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. See also Lester G. Crocker, Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1963, pp. 1-74 for a good discussion of the intellectual background to natural rights ideas, and the theories of natural law that were current in eighteenth century France.

Revolution in 1789, which in England forced a re-examination of many of the radical political ideas that had almost become a part of the currency of everyday political discussion, the abstract idea of inalienable political rights for men, which included that to be governed by elected assemblies, formed an important part of the intellectual climate of eighteenth century politics.[14] The second tradition upon which Paine's work drew was that of the English Dissenters, whose criticism of the established Anglican Church was linked to a suspicion of hereditary political authority and a disassociation from established social hierarchies.[15] Paine's father was a Quaker, and Quaker values strongly influenced Paine's thought: the idea that all men were equal, since all were the children of one God; the

14. Good accounts of radical political ideas and the more general intellectual climate of English politics in the latter half of the eighteenth century are in H.T. Dickenson, Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain, Methuen, London 1977, especially pp. 195-269, for the development of radical ideologies and popular radicalism in the 1790's; also John Brewer, Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III, Cambridge University Press 1976, especially pp. 163-200 for a discussion of the popular movements led by John Wilkes.

15. For a discussion of Dissent and political radicalism in eighteenth century England, see Russell E. Richey, 'The Origins of British Radicalism: The Changing Rationale for Dissent' in Eighteenth Century Studies Vol. 7. no. 2, Winter 1973-1974, pp. 179-192.

rejection of religious intermediaries between man and his Creator, and the assertion that man needed only his reason and conscience for his spiritual guidance.[16] These traditions combined to produce the arguments of his work Common Sense, published during his stay in America in 1776: the idea of natural rights, the demand for representative government and for the right of resistance to authority imposed without consent.[17] Like many other eighteenth century radicals, Paine also found the assumptions of Newtonian science particularly attractive, especially the idea that man should use his reason to understand the laws by which the universe was governed. By carrying these assumptions over into the study of society, Paine and many other radicals hoped that it might be possible to create a science for the understanding of society, by which all traditional and inherited institutions might be subjected to the scrutiny of man's reason. Paine himself bought a set of scientific instruments, and attended meetings addressed by two popular lecturers, Benjamin Martin and James Ferguson, who lectured in different parts of the country to audiences of religious dissenters, the self-educated, petty artisans and shopkeepers, among whom political radicalism and deism found many supporters.[18] Paine was also influenced by the work

16. See Henry Collins, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

17. For Thomas Paine's American experience, and the success of his pamphlet Common Sense, published in 1776, which had an enormous impact on the development of American republican opinion, see Henry Collins, op. cit., pp. 16-19.

18. ibid., pp. 6-7.

of the dissenting clergyman and scientist, Joseph Priestley, whose Essay on the First Principles of Government[19] was published in 1771.

The distinction between natural and civil rights, the former of which come from man's Maker, and may not be supplanted by any humanly created authority, even of the greatest antiquity, formed the most important part of Phule's intellectual debt to Paine. Paine set this argument out clearly in the course of rejecting Edmund Burke's criticism of the Declaration of the Rights of Man published by the French National Assembly in August 1789, and Burke's more general assertion of the inherent wisdom of human tradition as against institutions and governments created by a deliberate human act.[20] Paine rejected Burke's argument of the respect due to tradition:

> 'If any generation of men ever possessed the right of dictating the mode by which the world should be governed for ever, it was the first generation that existed; and if that generation did it not, no succeeding generation can show any authority for doing it, nor can any set it up. The illuminating and divine principle of the equal rights of man (for it has its origin from the Maker of man) relates, not only to succeeding individuals, but to generations of men succeeding each other. Every generation is equal in rights to the generations which preceded it, by the same rule that every individual is born equal in rights with his contemporaries'. 21.

19. For an account of Joseph Priestley's career and ideas, with much background information on the interaction between religious dissent, political radicalism and popular science, see F.W. Gibbs, Joseph Priestley, Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth, Nelson, London 1965.

20. A good discussion of the debate between Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke is in R.R.Fennessy, op. cit., especially pp 168-176 for Thomas Paine's natural rights theories, and pp. 213-250 for Thomas Paine's English influence in the popular radicalism of the 1790's.

21. Henry Collins, op. cit., p.88.

Throughout his work Slavery, Phule stressed that conventional Hindu religion was indefensible above all because of its violation of man's rights. In the Marathi introduction to the work, he compares the real intentions of the Creator, with the fictions of Brahman literature; 'God has given to the Sudras, ati-Sudras and other people the freedom to enjoy equally all the things of the earth which he created. But the Brahmans made up false books in his name, and trampled upon the rights of all other men, giving advantage only to themselves'.[22] He emphasises the importance of mental independence, without which man's sense of his proper rights may be lost; 'The great God who rules the world,and who sees everything, has given to every human being the same rights everywhere, but cunning people whose only concern is their own advantage may cause them to be hidden'.[23]

However, Phule associated this idea of human rights as much with Christian missionary efforts as with the work of European religious radicals. The lack of any sense of paradox in his simultaneous admiration of both is another reminder of the peculiar interaction between them that helped shape the religious and political radicalism of Phule and his friends. In one of the rare references to the immediate origins of his own religious position,

22. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 84.

23. ibid., p. 85.

he explains:

> 'From the time that the English rulers came into this country, many European and American men of truth could not bear to see our sufferings; so they came constantly to see us in our place of imprisonment, and gave us this advice, that you are human beings just like we are, the source of your creation and nurture is one with ours, and you, like us, are worthy of all forms of rights, so why do you defer to the contrived authority of these Brahmans? From all sorts of truthful suggestions such as these, I eventually understood my own true rights, and at once I kicked open the door of the fortress prison contrived by Brahma, and escaped outside, and then began to give my worship to our Creator'. 24

There are other areas of Paine's work, especially in The Rights of Man, which may have helped shape Phule's thought, or to which at least it shows strong parallels. Paine's intense admiration for America and, at the time of writing The Rights of Man, for France, may have contributed to Phule's sense of them as societies where human rights were particularly valued, and to his admiration of leaders such as George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette. Paine's description of governments of priestcraft as one of the most familiar ways in which men through the ages have been deprived of their proper rights, bears a remarkable similarity to Phule's characterisation of the rule of Brahmans in India. Paine described his government of priests:

> 'When a set of artful men pretended, through the medium of oracles, to hold intercourse with the Deity, as familiarly as they now march up the back-stairs in European Courts, the world was completely under the government of superstition. The oracles were consulted, and whatever they were made to say became the law'. 25

24. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p.145.

25. Henry Collins, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

Both Paine and Phule make a central part of their argument the idea that present-day governments, who founded their legitimacy on their great antiquity, had originated in some ancient act of usurpation. Paine argued that

> 'It could have been no difficult thing in the early and solitary ages of the world, while the chief employment of men was that of attending flocks and herds, for a banditti of ruffians to overrun a country and lay it under contributions. Their power being thus established, the chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch; and hence the origin of Monarchy and Kings'. 26

This violent origin had now been lost from sight:

> 'As time obliterated the history of their beginning, their successors assumed new appearances, to cut off the entail of their disgrace, but their principles and objects remained the same. What was at first plunder, assumed the softer name of revenue; and the power originally usurped, they affected to inherit'. 27

Phule's strong sense of affinity with Paine's work may even be traced to some common elements in their respective situations. Both came from families where individual skill and enterprise had brought some degree of independence and comfort: Paine's father was a successful craftsman stay-maker, and Phule's father was a shop-keeper in Pune.[28] Neither had received a conventional education, and both had used their own resources and skills to make a living and a reputation for themselves in the criticism of established social and

26. Henry Collins, op. cit., p.190.

27. ibid., p. 191.

28. ibid., pp. 11-12.

religious hierarchies that seemed to embody only the interests of the powerful.

3. Social life and the anthropological nature of man.

With his notion of the purpose of social and religious institutions in the realisation of abstract human rights, Phule maintained a strong concern with the social environment in which the common man lived his immediate and everyday life. His work Priestcraft Exposed contains in its ballads a collection of vignettes of ordinary Hindu family life, showing how he felt these rights to be violated. From this sense of the value of human activity as such, the empirical content of human existence, Phule also draws his more general idea of the anthropological nature of man, of the concerns and activities that make man pecularly what he is. His social and material life is the sphere in which man is able to externalise himself in shaping his physical and social circumstances, and to constitute his life in the full enjoyment of the social and religious rights bestowed on him by his Maker. Both the individual and collective aspects of human existence were important in this project of self-realisation. In his description of the relation of the individual to the community, Phule emphasises at once the homogeneity of all human experience, the submergence of the artificial ranks and orders of society in the activities and concerns common to all human life, and the value of unique individual experience. It is in his social and material life that the abstract potential present in every individual reveals itself in the very variety and richness of individual experience. While man's abstract common identity

is reflected and confirmed in shared human experience, it is in the uniqueness of each individual's assemblage of activity and experience that the human identity becomes, as it were, a concrete universal. The individual shows himself to be neither congruent with the particular and concrete social status ascribed to him in orthodox Hinduism, nor merely one of an undifferentiated human mass, but the particular and concrete realisation of an abstract human identity. This, for Phule, is man's real social being.

In his treatment of man's social activity, his concerns with his family, with making a living, with the common events and emotions of human existence, Phule therefore takes an explicit stand against the idea that human existence is merely transitory, illusory or unimportant. He characterises the conventional Hindu idea of worldly life as illusion as Brahman devices to draw attention away from the ruination of the lower castes. In Priestcraft Exposed, he contrasts these two quite different views of the meaning and value of the commonest of human concerns and activities. He describes in one ballad, the illness and death of a Sudra: 'How, at the time of the Sudra's death, the Brahman turns himself into the doctor, the priest and the director of the funeral, and how he deceives the Sudra's wife cruelly'. The priest attaches no value to the Sudra's domestic life: it is insignificant like all human existence, and death comes as a welcome relief. He has no feeling for the real anguish in the family, regarding the man's death merely as another stage in the journey of the soul. The family, on the other hand, endow these landmarks of human experience with enormous significance. It is the particular

individual that the family values, rather than the idea of a transcendent scheme of reincarnations, and it is clear that the latter idea, energetically advanced by the priest, serves only to give them a feeling of dislocation and bewilderment. Phule describes ironically how the ailing Sudra is too much attached to his family and worldly life:

> 'He tosses and turns in pain; he tries to think
> His mind delights in his worldly existence
> See how he has sunk in the illusions of worldly life'. 29

He describes the Sudra's very human fear of illness and death, but even these most central human experiences are, as it were, appropriated and distorted by the Brahman, who maximises his opportunity for gain. Phule describes the grief of the women of the family:

> 'Their minds filled with anguish, they look on passionately
> Inspect the husband closely
> As if the sky had fallen on them
>
> They get up hastily and go to the children
> Pick them up and take them on the hip
> Hurriedly give them milk to drink
>
> Leave them abruptly, go back again
> Meanwhile, the Brahman has fallen across their path
> He silences the women'. 30

The Brahman's religious worldview and his personal avarice unite to distort the experience of the family. Phule makes it clear that the family are neither convinced by the Brahman's interpretation, nor

29. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 59.

30. idem.

able to place the experience in any other scheme save that provided by their feeling of the value of all human life and activity, and of the meaning which collective experience and concern in the context of specific social forms like the family give to the life of each individual. The Brahman's exhortations are hence presented with great bitterness and irony:

> 'Why don't you give a gift and so let him die in peace of mind
> The cruelty of his worldly existence is over
> God's invitation has come'. 31

Phule points out the hollowness of the priest's position:

> 'Enough now of this false tenderness
> He applies himself now to whispering the puranas
> In vain this life is wasted
>
> The indifference of the twice-born: no proper arrangements are made
> See, many have gone thus to ruin
> Harrassed even at the door of death'. 32

The man's funeral expenses cause the family to mortgage his fields to the Brahman, who eventually claims them as his own; the women are forced to take work as labourers, and end their lives in destitution.

Elsewhere, Phule emphasises the importance of the individual and his proper relation with society. In his account of a marriage in Priestcraft Exposed, he protests against the submergence of the unique individual in the social roles of marriage, while the

31. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 60.

32. idem.

marriage is itself arranged on the basis of social hierarchies that bear no relation to the individual's real social being. The priests bustle about performing the rites and calculating the auspicious moments, and Phule also contrasts implicitly the astrological calculations of the priest as a basis for arranging marriage, with the qualities of the individuals themselves as the indicators of their compatibility:

> 'At the time of proposal the priest comes
> Affecting great airs he looks at the horoscope
>
> He builds up great hopes of gain
> He calculates the astrological houses and has the
> names of God repeated
>
> Calculating the marriage he spreads out his wares
> With a Ganapati made of supari
>
> A heap of coconuts as a food offering to the gods
> According to custom, the loot of daksina fees
>
> On paper he notes the lunar day
> Adorns the hand with kumkum
>
> The comparison of kind, age, qualities
> It never occurs to him to think of this'. 33

Phule describes the noise and confusion of the wedding, as the young bride and groom are put through the rites and ceremonies that establish their new roles and cement them into the larger social

33. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 50.

structure:

'Great hubbub before the wedding
Running about in all directions

At the start the husband gives the clothes
In the temple they put tila on the forehead

They get up quickly and go to the pavilion
They speak rapidly and tell them to hurry up

They put the materials for the rites into their hands
and follow after
The uncles decide in agreement

They stand in the middle with the curtain in their hands
Saying the mangal learnt off by heart

The clash of the cymbals and the confusion of all the
instruments
They say, behold the auspicious marriage'. 34

The result of all this may be the marriage of two people quite unsuited to each other as individuals.

'The bride and groom, poor ignorant things
Are given to each other and entangled for life'. 35

Instead, Phule urges that close relatives and friends should arrange the marriages in their families, on the basis of each individual's qualities:

'Do not give these things to others to do
With religion as the reason, being ruined needlessly

The young and old friends of each
Should choose a jury of their own caste

Their age, years, qualities and love
Examine and see these thoroughly

Put a garland of prayers for God
This is an agreement of happiness'. 36

34. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed. D.Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 51.

35. idem.

36. ibid., pp. 51-52.

Here, the social order is seen as the subject for rational criticism and control, on the basis of a strong idea of the value of the individual and his this-worldly activity.

In the Sivaji ballad, Phule makes clear the value he attaches to the worldly concerns and struggles of the individual. Sivaji reproaches his brother, Vyankoji, for having withdrawn from the world and his princely duties, and become a wandering ascetic, and the criticism is made with Hinduism's apparent tendendency to world renunciation more generally in mind:

> 'Calling yourself the son of a hero, how have you become a gosavi?
> Has the diamond feared the test?
> How has the imprint of our father been wiped away so quickly?
>
> My young brother, the beloved help at my back
> Why have you become angry with me?
> Accept my advice, come to the defence of my people
> Give up this villainous hypocrisy'. 37

The individual in Phule's thought is, however, firmly rooted within the larger human community. We have seen how Phule finds in human society the sphere in which man is able to realise himself, the collective experience which reflects man's common identity, and which is particularised and made concrete in the life of the individual. The normative framework within which Phule constructs this scheme is provided by God's relation to his human creatures. This

37. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 36. Gosavi is a term for a wandering ascetic.

resembles the relation of a father to his children; thus Phule refers to the British as 'the most beloved children of God'.[38] The family therefore forms the model for human society, whose internal relations should be those of brothers and sisters, without difference of rank or status. This is, of course, the paradigm for the actual community of the oppressed Sudras and ati-Sudras. At the end of Slavery, Phule gives in full a public announcement which he has made, in the shape of a letter to the Dnyanodaya newspaper, declaring that he would treat as a brother anyone who accepted and practiced the principle of a basic religious equality before God, denying Brahmanic pretensions to a mediating position between man and the divine and all the social distinctions to which this gave rise:

> 'Disregarding all the important books of the Brahmans which are used to support essays saying that we are their slaves, and all books connected with them, I undertake to consider as my younger brother before our Creator, and to act accordingly, the authors of books written to support the equal claims of all, whatever country or religion they may be from.
>
> Secondly, I will not bring into disrepute the right of the pure authority given by our Creator by tolerating those who consider anyone else to be despised through the arrogance of their distorted convictions.
>
> Thirdly, if I am convinced that any dasa (ksudra) has determined to worship only our Creator, and decided to pursue a clean trade, and is acting in accordance with this, then I will consider him as a very brother in my family and will share food with him, from whichever country he may be'.[39]

38. Jotirao Phule, A Ballad of the Raja Chatrapati Sivaji Bhosale, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 7.

39. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 144-145. The Marathi term dasa means a servant or slave. The term ksudra means low or insignificant.

The paradigm for the community of the oppressed is therefore an image of universal brotherhood amongst all those who believe in an original human equality. This brotherhood transcends all ties of social rank, language or religion. Here, Phule feels himself to be closer to sympathetic foreigners than to conventional Brahmans.

4. True and false patriotism.

Phule makes it clear that the image of universal brotherhood is the criterion not only for the lower caste community, but one which is applicable to society as a whole, which may be used to assess the larger political projects put forward by different groups. He holds this up as the standard by which contemporary expressions of patriotism are to be judged. In Chapter Five, we saw how Phule first encountered Thomas Paine's work, encouraged, as he said, by a few learned and 'progressive' Brahmans. They hoped to persuade their audience of young radicals in Pune that their conquest by the British had been the result of social and political weakness caused by the corruption of the true religion of the Hindus, in practices such as rigid caste divisions. The remedy for this weakness was for all castes to unite and return to the ancient purity of the Hindu religion, for without this the Hindus would never have the strength to drive the foreigners from their land.[40] Phule was scathing in his criticism of this variety of patriotism, seeing in it only a cloak for Brahman attempts to preserve traditional religious hierarchies from the reforming and radical influences that had

40. See pp.151-152, and Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 135.

accompanied British rule. He clearly regarded rule by the British as less of a violation of man's natural rights than the religious hierarchies that he associated with conventional Hinduism. The unity which the Brahmans had urged was not worth the price of a less than human status and existence for those at the bottom of the hierarchies of orthodox Hinduism: 'If the ancestors of these progressive and learned men had really understood the meaning of patriotism, they would not have written essays in their books in which their own countrymen, the Sudras, were regarded as lower than animals'.[41] The touchstone of real patriotism was the respect shown for each of one's fellow countrymen, regardless of social rank. It was in this sentiment of community that such patriotism showed itself, rather than in the desire to protect every aspect of indigenous culture from alien influences, regardless of their social effects.

5. Human history and the struggle against oppression.

A fundamental difference between the 'historical' religions, Christianity and Islam, and Hinduism, consists in their attitudes to history. While the latter conceives of human history as the eternal recurrence of illusion, the historical religion works out its destiny within those very processes, organised around the Church, the visible body of the faithful, the Book and the incarnated

41. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 135-136.

Saviour, and all human history takes its meaning from the struggle.[42] As we have seen, one of Phule's main concerns was to locate the struggle of the lower castes within history, to transform myth into history and establish a diachronic relation between present and past oppression. King Bali had stood as the symbol and mainstay of the pre-Aryan realm, but Phule employs his figure in another way, that strongly recalls the Christian vision of a returning Saviour, and its perception of all human history as the working out of a great struggle between good and evil. From the original figure of King Bali, Phule constructs a whole tradition of heroes, men who have taken the part of the weak and downtrodden against their oppressors. The connection with Christian eschatology does not lie merely in a structural similarity, since Christ himself is identified as a latter-day King Bali. There is in his thought a sense of the movement of all human history towards the realisation of God's kingdom on earth, although this is not the Christian God. Phule incorporates the Christian scheme within his own worldview, by the assimilation of Christ to a larger tradition of 'King Bali' figures. In the tenth section of his work Slavery, under the title 'Other King Balis', he describes the figure of Christ, although he does not

42. Again, I have drawn on Max Weber here, in his argument that the idea of karma makes impossible a religious eschatology of the world: instead, human history becomes 'an eternal, meaningless "wheel" of recurrent births and deaths rolling on through all eternity. Only two non-temporal realities are discoverable in it: the eternal order itself, and those beings, who, through escape of ongoing rebirths, must be conceived as their subjects'. Max Weber, op. cit., p. 167.

name him specifically:

> 'When a King Bali came into this world who was the champion of the poor, full of purity and speaking with his knowledge of the truth, he fixed firmly in his mind the intentions of the Creator and Lord of us all, and in order that all should have an equal enjoyment of the pure knowledge full of truth, and the rights which he has given to us all, he began to set free his poor, weak and ignorant brothers from the slavery of priests, deceitful, evil and cunning like the Brahman priests, and to establish God's kingdom upon earth; and in doing this, it seems to me that he fulfilled a prophecy made to his mother'. 43

The reference to Christ then grows more explicit, and Phule draws in Thomas Paine as the example of the effects of the Christian tradition in the social sphere:

> 'When the ancestors of great learned men like Thomas Paine became the followers of this King Bali, all their previous troubles and sufferings vanished and they became happy. And after a few evil men had put that King Bali on to the cross, a great movement began throughout Europe and thousands of people became his disciples, and laboured night and day as our Creator ordered, to establish his kingdom on earth'. 44.

The Buddha had belonged to the same tradition in his struggle against the vices of Brahmanic Hinduism, and his efforts had in turn provoked a Brahman reaction, in the campaign by the Sankaracaraya to

43. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 121.

44. ibid., p. 122. Again, the incongruity of Phule's association of Thomas Paine with the Christian tradition is striking.

reassert the values of orthodox Hinduism:

> 'He could not bear to see how the evil deeds of the Brahman caste were everywhere in disgrace, and how the religion of the Buddha was spreading everywhere. Because the behaviour of his people was no longer acceptable, he put a prohibition on the eating of beef and the drinking of alcohol, for which vices the Buddhist people had despised and ostracised the Vedas and all their books. He made changes in these, and in order to give them new strength he set up a new atheistic belief, which is today called the Vedanta, or the path of knowledge'. 45

At last this period of oppression had been brought to an end by the Christian missionaries who followed the armies of the East India Company:

> 'The disciples of that King Bali, the Scottish and American missionaries, came to this country without caring for the opinions of their own governments, and presenting to the treacherous Brahmans the authority of their true doctrines, they freed many Sudras from their snares, and broke the bonds of slavery around their necks'. 46

Phule identified the same struggle between the poor and weak and their oppressors in the history of other countries. This is done in the context of the discussion about the real nature of patriotism and the sense of community that it engenders. The conversion of a country to Christianity always resulted, Phule argued, in a great strengthening of this fellow-feeling, and he took as the greatest example of patriotism those who have been most concerned with the

45. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 122.

46. ibid., p. 123.

freedom and rights of their fellow countrymen:

> 'Before the coming of that King Bali, the English had learned their patriotism in the school of the Greeks; but when they became his disciples, that virtue grew amongst them so much that no people of another religion could compare with them. If you wanted to, you could also take the example of the American disciple of King Bali, George Washington; or if you did not want to use that one, then you could take the example of the French disciple of King Bali, Lafayette,and no-one could contradict you'. 47

Here, it is possible to see how Phule's perception of the meaning of much of human history, in a manner very similar to that of the interpretations which Christianity imposes, strengthens his scheme more generally. On the mass level, history becomes purposive. Behind its surface movements, can be discerned a more significant and perennial struggle between oppressive social and religious power, which would deprive man of his inborn rights and liberties; and the champions of the weak and of the common man against such power. Thus, for the lower castes, their struggle no longer appears as a local and transitory one, yet another example of the chaos and strife of human affairs, in which nothing real or permanent is to be found. Human history, like all aspects of human activity, does contain a meaning and a value which is discoverable through man's reason, and which acts as the normative framework in which his present life takes place. This perception of a meaning in the apparently random processes of history serves a dual purpose in Phule's scheme. It provides an interpretation of history that would be comprehensible from the point of view of the lower caste struggle. It would have been much more difficult to carry on this

47. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 135.

struggle within a more conventional interpretation of India's history. This probably struck Phule with particular force. As we have seen, he regarded the conflation of myth with history as a Brahmanic device in the legitimation of the present social order, and his great concern was to disengage the two and present an account of the past that stood as an apparently objective critique of present society, rather than its justification. Secondly, this interpretation of history provided the ideology of lower caste struggle with a greater sense of assurance and belief in ultimate victory. Since Phule's scheme was so diametrically opposed to prevailing interpretations of history and to conventional views of the value and meaning of man's this-worldly existence - at least, to those existing outside local and oral traditions - it might have carried with it a sense of isolation and futility. But the idea that the same struggle was carried on in many other areas of human history placed the task of the lower castes in a completely different perspective. Instead of existing as the opposition fighting on the fringes of an orthodox Brahmanic worldview, the struggle of the lower castes is placed at the very centre of the process of India's history, as its real meaning, and orthodox religion as a conspiracy to obscure it. The organisation of history around a series of 'King Bali' figures, whom Phule views as victorious in their own campaigns for the poor and weak in society, adds to this sense of assurance, and creates a series of real precedents for the struggle, running right up to Phule's own. Finally, the ultimate sanction for Phule's case lies in the divine nature itself, and Phule makes this clear when he describes all these figures as working to realise the kingdom of God on earth.

Chapter Twelve.

Traditional privileges and new skills: Phule's analysis of the nature of Brahman power in mid-nineteenth century western India.

1. Introduction.

In his play The Third Eye, Phule had set out the basic elements of his perception of the nature of Brahman power in nineteenth century western India.[1] Their rapid assimilation of new professional and administrative skills had enabled very large numbers of Brahmans to move into and dominate the local institutions of British administration. Besides their traditional functions as village priests and astrologers, village accountants, and small circles of professional advisers and administrators acting as government servants, there had been created in western Indian society a new Brahman group, who shared not only a common economic position, but, from their social and religious experience, a common attachment to the values of conventional Hindu religion. This meant that Brahmans at many different social levels saw the same social and religious values as serving their interests, both in matters of religious authority and in the secular sphere of local administrative power and occupational competition. Since all Brahmans saw their interests as served by the preservation of traditional religious values, they would

1. See pp. 170-187.

naturally regard each other's interests as their own, and tend to give each other practical support wherever possible. Phule's virulent anti-clericalism was the natural consequence of his argument that Hindu religion represented the worldview and interests of one social group only, a worldview which others might accept in their awe of Brahmanic religious authority, but one which could result only in exploitation and delusion.

These basic elements of analysis had changed little during the decade and a half that followed the writing of The Third Eye, and still broadly represented Phule's view as he expressed it in this period. Still at the centre of his concern were the ideas that the caste position of Brahman employees in local revenue, and educational and judicial institutions, affected both their own attitudes, and those of the lower caste Hindus upon whom these institutions impinged; that, as a crucial link with the revenue administration, the kulkarni or village accountant used his considerable administrative and economic power both for his personal advantage and to protect the religious values to which, as a Brahman, he was attached; and that these concentrations of power led to widespread illegal exactions and corruption against which the larger masses of rural society had little defence.

While the argument of corruption was a relatively easy one to convey to a popular audience, the rejection of the religious authority of Brahman priests, which Phule saw as the pre-condition for all the other kinds of power enjoyed by Brahmans, was a much more difficult matter. The crucial psychological point at which a potential

follower would have to reject Brahman religious authority came in the performance of ritual itself. Here, what had always appeared as the most sacred and unalterable realities of social and religious life would have to be reinterpreted to a popular audience in the terms of Phule's account of Maharashtra's history since ancient times. The very extremism of Phule's anti-Brahman polemic may be explained in part in the need for a degree of emotional conviction that would match that with which traditional beliefs had been held. His attempt to evoke this kind of response focussed on his portrayal of the figure of 'the Brahman' as a unique assemblage of all imaginable social and moral evils. As in The Third Eye, the idea of a tightly controlled conspiracy underlay much of his description. The different areas of Brahman activity - in the religious and economic life of the village, in the new local and provincial political institutions, in the religious reform societies and the social reform movement amongst Brahmans - were but different manifestations of an essentially unitary force, waging a hidden war on these different fronts to maintain the power of Brahmans as against other social groups, and appearing in different guises the better to confuse and mislead its victims.

Yet the polemical technique that Phule employed to suggest the real relationship between areas of Brahman activity that appeared to all intents and purposes unconnected, represented a considerable refinement on his earlier emphasis on a deliberate conspiracy. The difficulty with a conscious argument of conspiracy was, of course, that it was difficult to maintain with conviction in all contexts,

and what might work very well in the heat of a gathering of followers might carry less conviction in a more sober analysis. Rather than placing the idea of an actual conspiracy at the forefront of his argument, he projected the association of different kinds of Brahman activity to his popular audiences in a much subtler, almost subliminal way. By associating and juxtaposing his description of different kinds of Brahman activity, he managed to import into his argument in an almost pre-conscious way the assumption of some connection between them. At first sight, he appears merely to be shifting his argument about in the most strangely haphazard way. He describes, for example, the nature of India's economic relationship with Britain, and its effects in impoverishing India's craftsmen; then quite unexpectedly asserts that the basic reason for their poverty should be traced back to the prohibition placed upon crossing the Attock river by the Aryan invaders of ancient India, which was intended to prevent the lower castes from learning any skills that might contribute to their advancement. Again, he describes the recent history of Maharashtra, and the oppression of the lower castes under peshwa rule. Then he suddenly conflates the latter with the ancient enemies of the lower castes, declaring that he rejoiced to see the British triumph over the tribe of Parąsuram. Most frequently, he takes the argument of an ancient Brahman act of conquest, and telescopes it with the description of the different powers of Brahmans in contemporary society. He describes how the Brahmans had originally condemned the Sudras to ignorance and deprived them of their

religious rights at the time of the Aryan invasions. In the same breath, he argues that the new political organisations set up to unite the people, and present their views to the British government, represented only a new set of Brahman instruments for the extension of their power and influence over the lower castes, much as the ancient Aryans had declared themselves to be bhudeva, gods on earth, before their newly conquered subjects. These apparently fortuitous associations of ideas combined to produce what was, in fact, a highly sophisticated and effective polemical instrument for the interpretation to a popular audience of Maharashtra's history and contemporary society, and the significance of Brahman activities in them. It assumed, throughout, the interconnectedness of all kinds of Brahman power, presenting this as a fact so obvious that it needed no particular argument or demonstration to prove it.

It is perhaps worth noting here that, at this level, Phule's polemic shares much in common with other 'conspiracy' theories of politics, adopted by a wide range of social and religious groups in quite different cultural settings. In common with, for example, the intense anti-Catholicism that was such a prominent feature of seventeenth century England, or indeed the later anti-Communism of the American right, Phule's ideological strategy was to present the enemies of the lower castes, the scattered Brahman communities of western India, as a tightly organised monolith, with an essential

unity and common purpose in carrying out its designs.[2] Like these other groups, Phule attributed to his opponents a degree of consistency and shared intent that certainly went far beyond any reality. But the point here is not that Phule misjudged or miscalculated the real extent of Brahman unity. His purpose here was not to offer a detached description of Brahman activities, but to present them in a form that would supply what he felt to be the ideological needs of a popular movement. This is not, however, to argue that Phule regarded this interpretation of Brahman power merely as an instrument to goad a lower caste following into a common opposition. There is always the sense in his writing that even his most lurid portrayals of Brahman conspiracy reflected, in a much distorted form, the basic truth that the different Brahman communities of western India did derive a kind of unity from their common religious loyalties.

2. Priestcraft Exposed: the Brahman in history and contemporary society.

From the description of the Aryan invasion in the first ballad of the work Priestcraft Exposed, Phule turned directly to the

2. For a discussion of the ideas of a Catholic conspiracy in seventeenth century England, see Carol Z. Wiener, 'The Beleaguered Isle: A Study of Elizabethan and early Jacobean anti-Catholicism' in Past and Present, no. 51, May 1971, and Robin Clifton, 'The Popular Fear of Catholics during the English Revolution', in Past and Present, no. 52, August 1971. See also Franz Neumann's classic work on the effects of 'conspiracy' theories in reinforcing the unity of the group, providing a focus for its anxieties and fears, and creating a dynamic for it, in its opposition to a supposed enemy: H. Marcuse (Ed), F.L. Neumann. The Democratic and the Authorarian State. Essays in Political and Legal Theory, Glencoe 1957, especially the chapter "Anxiety and Politics", pp.270-300.

present-day exploitation of the lower castes in conventional religious ritual. In four narrative pieces, he traced the dependence of the kunbi upon the Brahman priest at almost every stage of his life. The first piece recalls the story of The Third Eye. It described how the Brahman priest goes to the house of the Sudra at the birth of his child and terrifies the couple with tales of malevolent planetary influences, so that they ruin themselves in performing propitiatary rites and feasting large numbers of Brahmans.[3] The second piece describes 'How the Brahman priest plunders the Sudra at his wedding'. It depicts all the noise and clamour of the conventional Hindu wedding, as the Brahman hurries carelessly through mantras and astrological calculations incomprehensible to the family, thinking only of the size of his marriage fee.[4] The third piece describes the ceremonies, expenditures and feasting that are necessary for the Sudra when his daughter reaches puberty, and the fourth when the Sudra builds a new house. Here, Phule contrasts the labour and sweat of the Sudras who build the house with the parasitical living made by the Brahman:

> 'In the heat of the summer the labourer digs the foundations
> He carries small baskets of plaster
>
> The stonemason climbs up steep hills
> Spreads out the bricks in the cold
>
> The carpenter climbs up like a monkey
> He dovetails the pieces of wood together
>
> All of them suffer just to fill their stomachs
> None of them are afraid to work'. [5]

3. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D.Keer and S.G.Malshe, p. 50.

4. ibid., p. 51.

5. ibid., p. 53.

But at the end of the day, it is the Brahman who has come to perform the ceremonies for the new house, and not the labourers who have built it, who feasts on the delicacies provided by the owner of the house:

'Let your way of living be consumed in flames
Fresh food before those who have laboured
This is a shameful deed
The intelligent will understand your tricks'. 6

Phule then extended his sphere of analysis of the real effects of Brahman religious practices on the life of the village Sudra, in a ballad which oscillates between references to history, new perceptions of contemporary social practices, and appeals to the British government. From the Aryan invasions and the subsequent reduction of the Sudras to ignorance and servitude, he turns to the religious power of Brahmans, recounting all the different ritual occasions upon which the Brahman's services are required, the deceptions practised and the Brahman's gain:

'At Nagapancami, on the eighth day of each fortnight
A great weight of Brahman feasts
Rivers of butter on the cakes of wheat

He spreads himself out, he puts his feet up
The trade of the priest in Bhadarapad
He grows sleek and fat

At Vijayadasami he makes them worship horses,
Choice titbits on the thirteenth day of the waning moon in Asvin
The worship of Laksmi in the account books

6. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G.Malshe, P. 54.

At the wedding of the Tulasi, at Makarasankrant
I tell you of the fruits of the whole year
I take my wages in my hand

The money is squandered, the Sudra is ruined
The rites of the Holi feast still remain
Their shouts ring out loud'. 7

From this, Phule turns to his argument of the power of Brahman employees in local judicial and revenue institutions, and the corruption which resulted. In the registration of mortgage bonds and debts, and in the drawing up of depositions when cases of debt came to the courts, illiterate cultivators were at the mercy of Brahman clerks, who would foment quarrels, alter bonds and distort depositions in return for bribes and other favours. Brahmans here could extend their power in another way, by encouraging a creditor to serve notice, then offering to lend the debtor money himself, with his land as security:

'He lives for money only; he has no pity
He arranges for a petition to be served on the owner
He gives the money for the mortgage himself

He waits his chance and achieves his aim
He presses for repayment relentlessly
Demands his money without remorse

The size of the debt is doubled
He copies it down onto the mortgage bond
Now two owners are given on the card in the register

7. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 56-57.

With his ritual purity and the marks of the sacred
ashes on his forehead
He storms at the owner
He blames him for every expense'. 8

Phule concludes the work with another invocation of history and an appeal to the British government:

'Oh Queen, give us your attention
I sing of this sorrow, weeping
The twice-born have deceived the Sudras

Teach the Sudras, my lame brothers
Brahma first made them slaves
He prohibited them from learning

Listening to your praises, we came running
You released the world's slaves
You gave the example to all'. 9

In the short piece, Brahman Teachers in the Education Department, and in the English introduction to and the closing chapters of Slavery, Phule examines more systematically the temporal power of Brahmans in local administrative institutions. In the former, the

8. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G.Malshe, p. 57. In this identification of the figure of the Brahman with that of the money-lender, Phule touched upon an ideological issue that was to become increasingly important within the non-Brahman movement itself, and particularly as the movement spread from its early base amongst largely urban and commercial social groups, to the rural areas of the Deccan, and those more directly engaged in agriculture. See pp. 358-366.

9. Jotirao Phule, Priestcraft Exposed, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 58-62. The reference in the last verse is to the British abolition of slavery earlier in the century, and recalls Phule's linkage of the condition of the lower castes, and those of the negro slaves of America.

Brahman schoolteacher in a village uses both his religious authority, and his immediate power in the school, to withhold education from the lower castes, and to mislead his superiors about the desire of the Sudras for learning. In this way, both the traditional values of the Brahman, and the administrative innovations of the Bombay government conspire to reinforce the inequities in village society. The Brahman schoolteacher treats his low caste pupils quite differently from the children of his own caste fellows:

'If the children of their own caste make mistakes, they
repeat and explain
They give punishments wisely
If other children make mistakes, they strike them
with their fists
They twist their ears sharply
Unnoticed, they beat the Sudra children and make them
run away'. 10

Brahman school inspectors colluded with the schoolteachers and sent in misleading reports of the educational aptitude of the children of the cultivators:

'Inspectors of their own caste
Examine all the masters
The master tells of their qualities
He describes them angrily
He greatly exaggerates the report
I will tell you a little of it
"The caste of Sudras have got no sense
They have no desire for education at all"
This is not true; the Brahmans are impostors
They achieve their ends and promote the position
of their own caste
No one brings them to justice'. 11

10. Jotirao Phule, Brahman Schoolteachers in the Education Department, published in Satyadipika, September 1869 (Marathi) p. 87. A copy of this and of other numbers of the journal are available in the Mumbai Marathi Granthasangrahalaya, Dadar, Bombay.

11. ibid. p. 89.

The Bombay government had failed to take a proper interest in education at the village level, and so knew nothing of the malpractices of its Brahman employees:

> 'When a blind man grinds the corn,
> The dogs eat all the flour'. 12

Phule then turned to attack 'reformist' Brahmans. As I have argued, Brahman social reformism presented Phule with a peculiar difficulty.[13] On one hand, he held no hopes of real social radicalism from it. On the other, he feared that the apparent willingness of some Brahman groups for social change would further mislead the British administration. This emerged clearly here:

> 'They say that education has made them repentant
> In fact they reform themselves only to secure themselves
> good positions with the British
> While at home they continue to worship pieces of stone'. 14

He finished with an appeal for the education of schoolteachers from the lower castes:

> 'Appoint teachers from other castes
> Appoint those with a knowledge of the truth
> Prepare a class of schoolteachers
> Only of Malis and kunbis
> Another for Mahars and Mangs'. 15.

12. Jotirao Phule, Brahman Schoolteachers in the Education Department, Satyadipika, September 1869, p. 91

13. See p. 178.

14. Jotirao Phule, Brahman Schoolteachers in the Education Department, Satyadipika, September 1869. p. 91

15. ibid., p. 92.

Phule continued his description in the work Slavery, attempting to convey to his British readers, in the English introduction, the unrecognised threat to the power of the administration in the shape of its own executives: 'The Brahman despoils the Sudra not only in his capacity of a priest, but does so in a variety of other ways. Having, by his superior education and cunning monopolised all the higher places of emolument, the ingenuity of his ways is past finding out'.[16] He concluded the introduction:

> 'I have tried to place before my readers in the concluding portions of this book what expedients are employed by these Brahman officials for fleecing the Coonbee in the various departments to which business or his necessities induce him to resort. Anyone knowing intimately the workings of the different departments, and the secret springs which are in motion will unhesitatingly concur with me in saying that what I have described in the following pages is not one hundredth part of the rogueries that are generally practiced on my poor, illiterate and ignorant Sudra brethren'.[17]

The most powerful Brahman groups were the kulkarnis in the villages, who 'already have their influence firmly established over the Sudras by means of their cunning religion'.[18] The office of the kulkarni provided immense opportunities for corruption and

16. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 78.

17. ibid., p. 79.

18. ibid., p. 127.

extortion:

> 'Some kulkarnis get hold of whichever Sudras have no idea how to read and write, and lend them money. When they get their signature on the mortgage bond, they employ a writer who is one of their caste fellows and take him into the plot, write down one thing and read out something else to the ignorant Sudra, put the pen in his hand and get the deed completed. After a few days, they seize hold of the title to the land, following the insertion that they have cunningly made in the document'. 19

Even the boldest and most articulate cultivator had little chance of redress:

> 'If some daring fellow, clad in a loincloth, plucks up his courage, and with the help of the butler gains a private audience with the European Collector and tells him that his complaint has received no redress, and just the news of these few words reaches the clerks, then that fellow is done for. It will be passed all round the Collector's office, from the Brahman secretary to all the Brahman workers in the revenue and judge's departments. Then half of these cut-throat clerks collect together different sorts of evidence and testimony and make themselves witnesses for the plaintiff, and the other half do the same and become witnesses for the defendant, and throw the man's dispute into absolute chaos'. 20

Phule then turned to describe the powers of the Brahman officials in the city and all the abuses that their peculiar administrative position made possible. In the city, the mamledar and the kulkarni between them controlled the bureaucratic processes attached to every sort of activity: 'In the municipality of Pune, if some householder wants to build a new privy in place of his old one, he is not allowed to build until he gets the approval of the kulkarni of his ward, through the Brahman mamledar'. 21

19. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D.Keer and S.G.Malshe, p. 129.

20. ibid., p. 130.

21. ibid., p. 131.

Bureaucratic processes had been brought into existence, but these lacked overall coherence, and so real power in municipal affairs lay with a small administrative elite. For example, 'The kulkarni has all the plans of the city, to which the names of those who purchase new property must be added. But because there is no practice of giving a copy for examination to the mamledar's office, how is anyone to know whether the kulkarni's report on those places is true?"[22] Brahmans used their majority on the municipal committee to monopolise all the facilities of the city for its Brahman wards, particularly in the control and distribution of water.[23]

Similar corruption was rife among those employed to administer government public works. Phule related numerous stories of this that he said had been told to him, such as that of the impoverished cultivator and his family whose brother took a job as a labourer building the roads:

> 'Even there, the Brahmans didn't do a stroke of work; they merely took down the register of those present morning and evening. Then if there should be some criticism of the British government or its religion in the Marathi newspapers, they would preach to the labourers about it, then go back to their lodgings; and for this, even the government gave them twice as much pay as the labourers. And if, on getting his pay, the labourer did not give him something to grease his palm, he would make up all sorts of stories about him to the officer in charge'.

22. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G.Malshe, p.131.

23. ibid., pp. 138-139. The Pune Municipality had been established in June 1957 under the Municipality Act of 1850. Until the Local Self-Government Act of 1882, all members were nominated by Government. Phule himself served from 1876 to 1882 as a member of the Pune Municipality: see pp. 19-22.

The cultivator voices his frustration before this combination of religious and administrative power:

> 'When my brother comes home from his labouring work, he tells me how the Brahmans harrass him quietly in this way, and he says "What can I do, brother, these Brahmans are the spiritual guides of all the other castes, and our religious books say plainly that we should not complain against them whatever they do". All my remedies are at an end. Perhaps I should learn to speak English so that I can tell the Sahebs about all the schemes of the Brahmans, then this slavery would be broken'. 24

Finally, Phule argued, Brahmans dominated the expression of public political opinion in the vernacular press. Here, his main worry was that the public inarticulacy of the lower castes, the result of their overall lack of education and of proper organisation, would make them politically invisible. It was bad enough that all the editors of the vernacular newspapers were Brahmans, and that they would never speak a word against a member of their own caste. What was even worse was that the government mistakenly believed that the political opinions expressed in the newspapers represented the views of the Sudras and untouchables as well as those of their high caste editors:

> 'If they think this, then our credulous government is very much mistaken. They do not understand that the Brahmans and the Sudras and ati-Sudras never come together in this sort of work in their whole lives. Many ati-Sudras do not even know the meaning of the word "newspaper". It might as well be a kind of jackal or a dog or a monkey as far as they are concerned. So how can all these ritually pure newspapers possibly know what the opinions are of all the ati-Sudras that they have never had anything to do with?'. 25

24. Jotirao Phule, Slavery, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 131-133.

25. ibid., p. 139.

3. Conclusion.

In the year of its publication, 1869, Phule's work Slavery was reviewed in the literary journal Vividhadnyan Vistar. The reviewer made it clear that Phule's work met none of his own criteria for literary merit or historical accuracy. The review began:

> 'These days, some devotee of Mhasoba by the name of Jotiba, apparently an amateur ballad-singer, has been laying his offerings of ballads before us. But it seems that his skill does not only lie in composing ballads; he gives the impression that he is similarly skilled in ancient history, in religious and moral philosophy and in general knowledge. We have no idea who this man is or where he lives; but we are able to make a guess at his talent from his work. It would demand great effort and intelligence to describe the virtues of his work, so we have here given a few extracts from it, so that our readers may decide for themselves'. 26.

The reviewer then went on to describe the contents of Slavery and give some examples of Phule's ballads. Finally, he offered his own criticisms of Phule's descriptions of Brahman power in Maharashtrian society. In the first place, some of the friends that Phule had thanked in the introduction to the work were themselves Brahman. Then if it were really true that Brahmans were responsible for the deaths of thousands of untouchables, what would be the fate of Brahmans in India if men like Phule ever came to power and decided to take revenge for these episodes of ancient Indian history? As for Phule's derivations of the terms 'Mahar' and 'Ksatriya', the reviewer suggested that he should consult the Royal Asiatic Society to see what they thought of his ideas. Then, if it were true that

26. Vividhadnyan Vistar. (Marathi). July 1869.

Brahmans came from outside India, so did the Ksatriyas, which gave the lie to Phule's whole description of pre-Aryan society. In particular, no one ever thought of calling the Mahars Ksatriyas, even though in Phule's account they had been the foremost defenders of the pre-Aryan communities.[27]

The answer to the reviewer's criticisms, of course, was that Phule never intended his work as a purely literary or antiquarian contribution to higher research. Rather, he hoped to present an account of the religious and political power of Brahmans in contemporary society that would provide a lower caste follower with a basis for rejecting the Brahman's claims to act as his religious guide. In his work, the lower caste individual would find new explanations and a new mode of perceiving the apparently unequal distribution of political power and resources among different groups. In particular, he would gain a more effective means of understanding what Phule presented as the major new source of power available to Brahman social groups: their position as a clerical and administrative elite under the British government.

27. Vividhadnyan Vistar (Marathi), July 1869.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Satyashodhak Samaj in the 1870's.

1. Introduction.

From this attempt at a reconstruction of the main features of Phule's ideas as they developed between 1869 and 1873, I would like to turn to a very brief examination of the Satyashodhak Samaj, the 'Truth-Seeking Society', founded by Phule and his colleagues in September 1873. Firstly, the need to examine the origins and internal structure of Phule's own ideas may have created the impression that he was alone in his attempts at constructing a critique of conventional society from the point of view of the lower castes. However, throughout his career, Phule's circle included writers and activists who worked within the same basic framework of ideas, although each produced their own distinctive analysis and concentrated on slightly different areas of organisation and propaganda. In this way, Phule's ideas can be placed within their proper context as part of a spectrum of opinion amongst lower caste activists in Pune and Bombay in the 1870's, rather than seen as a sudden and isolated effort of criticism and imagination. The second purpose of this brief sketch is to indicate the nature of support for the Satyashodhak Samaj in the years immediately following its formation, and to suggest how this may be fitted in with its ideological preconceptions. This will lead on to some broader arguments about the relationship between ideology and political

activity in the Satyashodhak Samaj, which will be followed up in the conclusion.

2. Colleagues and contemporaries in the 1870's.

Two of the most important of Phule's contemporaries in the Satyashodhak Samaj were Krsnarao Bhalekar and Narayanrao Lokhande. Bhalekar (1850-1910) was born in the village of Bhamburade near Pune. His family were Malis, and his father went to work as a clerk in the District Court at Pune. Left an orphan at the age of sixteen, he went to a mission school in Pune, and then took a job in the English office of the District Judge's Court in Pune.[1] Before the formation of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and even before he met Phule, Bhalekar had been engaged in some anti-Brahman propagandizing in his village of Bhamburade.He had organised a play entitled 'How the hypocritical Brahmans deceive the credulous and uneducated people in the name of religion', and had tried to rally local opinion against the employment of Brahmans in the Satyanarayan

1. Krsnarao Bhalekar, MSS autobiography entitled 'A short account of Krsnarao Bhalekar'. Bhalekar's papers are in the large MSS collection held by Dr. R. M. Patil in Pune. The best work on Bhalekar, an important and neglected figure in the non-Brahman movement, is in Y.D. Phadke, Individuals and Thought, Pune, 1979, (Marathi), the chapter entitled 'The search for the Satyashodhaks', pp. 41-64.

puja.[2] When Phule heard of Bhalekar's activities, he visited him, and Bhalekar subsequently joined the Satyashodhak Samaj, becoming a member of its Managing Committee in 1874. For most of the 1870's he worked hard as an ideologue and activist for the Samaj, starting the Din Bandhu, 'The Brother of the Poor' newspaper in 1887, and taking part in the organisational activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj. He was also a prolific writer, much of his material appearing in the Din Bandhu and later non-Brahman newspapers, and collected and published after his death. From 1877, however, he and Phule began to quarrel,[3] and Bhalekar turned increasingly to his own independent programmes of lower caste organisation.

2. Krsnarao Bhalekar MSS, entitled 'Utterances at the time of death', quoted in Y. D. Phadke, op. cit., pp. 43-44. Phadke argues convincingly that the formation of Bhalekar's anti-Brahman ideas was influenced by indigenous traditions of criticism of Brahmanic religion, especially his early association with a wandering ascetic of anti-Brahmanical views, and his grandfather, who was a follower of Kabir, the medieval lower caste saint from Banaras who preached a combination of popular Vaisnavite philosophy with Sufism. I have not here pursued the larger subject of the influence of these indigenous traditions upon Phule's contemporaries. Where Phule was concerned, I have argued that his own radicalism developed under the impact of western influences. Where he drew on aspects of traditional culture, this was not so much the original source of his radicalism, as a mode of translating it into a concrete ideological programme.

3. For an analysis of the quarrel between Phule and Bhalekar, see Y.D. Phadke, op. cit., pp. 44-46. Phadke argues that the quarrel was personal rather than ideological. However, they did disagree when Bhalekar subjected the work of a woman polemicist of Buldhana, Tarabai Sinde, to harsh criticism for her assertion that the moral characters of women were superior to men's, in her work A comparison between men and women, Buldhana 1882 (Marathi). Phule replied to Bhalekar's criticism in the pamphlet Satsar, published in October 1885. See D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 291-304.

Equally important as a campaigner and polemicist was Narayanrao Lokhande (1848-1907), son of a poor Mali from Thana district. After a secondary school education he went to work in Bombay as a clerk in a railway office, and then in a post office, and finally as a storekeeper in a cotton mill.[4] He joined the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1874. He undertook extensive organisational activity during the 1870's, concerning himself especially with the conditions of workers in the cotton mills in Bombay. Early in 1880, he founded the Mill Hands Association, which agitated for shorter working hours and better conditions for labourers.[5] He wrote prolifically in the Din Bandhu, which he took over as editor in May, 1880, and also published The Satyashodhak Nibandhamala, or a true understanding of the Hindu religion, which argued that a study of some of the most ancient Hindu texts showed that caste divisions had only recently become rigid. The texts themselves actually

4. Dhananjar Keer, Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, p. 157.

5. For this early episode in the history of the labour movement in Bombay, see S.D. Mehta, The Cotton Mills of India: 1854 to 1954, Bombay 1954, pp. 132-145. A discussion of the social factors, including the role of caste, in the organisation of the workforce, is in R.K. Newman, 'Social Factors in the Recruitment of the Bombay Millhands', in K.N. Chaudhuri and Clive J. Dewey (Eds.), Economy and Society: Essays in Indian Economic and Social History, Oxford University Press 1979, pp. 277-295, and M.D. Morris, The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: a Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947, University of California Press, 1965, pp. 71-83.

enjoined that caste status should be a reflection of the virtues of the individual, but Brahmans through the ages had kept other castes ignorant of the content of these texts, in order to preserve their religious privileges.[6]

Another important activist and polemicist for the Satyashodhak Samaj in the 1870's was Ramayya Vyankayya Ayyavaru, of the Telugu Mali community in Bombay.[7] Ayyavaru was a wealthy contractor in Bombay, who helped Phule to form the Bombay branch of the Samaj, and contributed to the purchase of a printing press with another Telugu Mali contractor, Vyanku Kalewar.[8] The Telugu Mali community in Bombay provided a large number of active supporters, mostly merchants and contractors by profession, men such as Jaya Karadi Lingu, P. Rajanna Lingu and Narasinha Saibu.

6. N.M. Lokhande, The Satyashodhak Nibandhamala, or a true understanding of the Hindu religion, Bombay 1886. (Marathi). The title recalls the famous Nibandhamala of the Brahman conservative Visnusastri Cipalunkar, a monthly journal started in 1874. In 1877, Cipalunkar published a very hostile account of the activities of the Satyashodhak Samaj, and of Phule's own work, in much the same style as the reviewer in the Vividhadnyan Vistar. (See pp. 307-308). See V.V. Sathe (Ed), The Nibandhamala of the late Visnusastri Cipalunkar, Pune 1926, pp. 440-457.

7. The Telugu Malis were a small community mainly concentrated in Bombay, Thana and the western Deccan. They had come to the Bombay presidency early in the century from Hyderabad and Madras. As a caste, they ranked closely with Maharashtra's Malis, and carried out a similar range of occupations: fruit and vegetable cultivation, labouring, and in the towns worked as traders and contractors.

8. D. Keer, op. cit., p.134.

The Satyashodhak Samaj also included writers and activists of a much humbler caste background: Dhondiram Namadev Kumbhar, a potter, was a member who wrote prolifically during the 1890's,[9] and Gopalbaba Valangakar, a Mahar who came to Pune while serving in the army, where he met Phule during one of his visits to address untouchables in the army.[10] He wrote a great deal for the Din Bandhu. His main work, The Elimination of Untouchability, was a sustained critique of caste divisions, pointing out their inconsistencies, and suggesting that Mahars were Ksatriyas who had become polluted by eating meat during famines. Valangakar organised the first separate body to be concerned specifically with the conditions of untouchables, 'The Society for removing the stain of non-Aryan descent'.[11] Valangakar thus shared a concern with the same ideological issues as Phule - with Ksatriya status and the significance of an Aryan or non-Aryan descent - but applied it to a different social group.

9. Dhondiram published at least three major works during the 1890's: The Mirror of Truth, Bombay 1893 (Marathi), a collection of verses about the exploitation of ignorant Sudras by Brahman priests; Thoughts on the Vedas, Bombay 1896 (Marathi), describing the preoccupation of the Vedas with animal sacrifices; and Tamasa, Thana 1897 (Marathi), which condemned the immoral music and behaviour amongst the Marathas associated with the tamasa, a traditional form of village celebration.

10. See p. 357.

11. Valangakar's work The Elimination of Untouchability is reprinted in Purogami Satyashodhak, 5, 3, July-September 1979 (Marathi), pp. 9-32. For some details of Valangakar's career and ideas, see the introduction to the above by R. O'Hanlon, pp. 1-8.

3. The formation of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

According to one of Phule's friends, Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan, Phule and his friends had been accustomed to meeting at his shop in Pune every Sunday for discussion and reading, some months before the decision to found the Samaj was taken. During this period, Phule had been turning over in his mind how the lower castes might be freed from Brahman influence.[12] Having taken the decision to form a society, he and his colleagues called a meeting in Pune, in September 1873, which was attended by about sixty people, three of them Brahmans. The meeting decided the name of the institution, that it should be open to all castes, and that its chief purpose should be to rescue the Sudras and ati-Sudras from the influence of Brahmanic religion.[13] The ceremony for joining the Samaj closely reflected the use of the figure of Khandoba made in Phule's earlier writing. It consisted of picking up the tali, which had in it tumeric, red powder, raw sugar, coriander leaves, betel leaves and betel nut. Having picked it up, the new member would shout out the names of Jotiba, Khandoba and Bahiroba.[14] Phule was elected the first President and Treasurer of the Samaj, and Narayanrao Kadalak its Secretary.

From its foundation, the Samaj held weekly meetings at the

12. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to Mukundrao Patil, 11 July 1923, quoted in Y.D. Phadke, op. cit., p. 43.

13. D. Keer, op. cit., p. 127.

14. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to P.S. Patil, Cincavad, 6 February 1928, and Govind Bhau Patil to P.S. Patil, Otur, 26 May 1931, P. S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur. For earlier references to the worship of Khandoba, see pp. 213-215. Jotiba is a deity of southern Maharashtra, usually portrayed as a linga of the god Mahadeva.

house of one of its members, Dr. Gavade. Early in 1874, Phule went to Bombay to open a branch of the Samaj, where its strongest support came from the Telegu Mali community. By 1876 the Pune branch had 316 members, and in the course of one year, September 1875 to September 1876, had collected Rs. 766-12-9, donated in gifts and subscriptions by 63 members and 35 well-wishers.[15] The early concerns of the Samaj, reported in its third annual report of 1876, covered a wide range. It decided to send free copies of Phule's works Slavery and Priestcraft Exposed to Indian princes and other influential men; to send aid to the victims of the flood disaster at Ahmedabad; to set up a night school in Bhalekar's village of Bhamburade to give education to those that had no time to study during the day; to spend five rupees a month to employ a servant to see that the children of the Sudras were conducted to school every day rather than wasting their time on the streets; to hold an elocution competition on the subject of idol worship and the Samaj, to give members more experience in public speaking; and to establish a boarding house in Pune for poor students from the rural areas.[16] Great emphasis was also placed on the performance of religious ceremonies without the aid of Brahmans. Phule composed a set

15. The Third Annual Report of the Satyashodhak Samaj, Pune 1876, reprinted in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 153-164.

16. idem. Out of the twenty-nine resolutions reproduced in the report, eighteen were concerned with some aspect of education: with the award of small scholarships, with the petitioning of government schools and colleges to admit a certain number of lower caste students, with the establishment of accommodation for students, and with the offering of prizes to the most accomplished students.

of words to be used at marriages, the bride and groom speaking the words themselves. In December 1873, Phule arranged for the marriage of a young relative according to the Satyashodhak ritual, and another in May 1874 for his friend and colleague, Gyanoba Sasane.[17] In 1873 Phule also performed the ceremony of the Tulasi wedding at his own house without a Brahman, and this example was followed by Ramaseth Bapuseth Uravane, a wealthy Pune merchant and member of the Samaj, and by another member, Kusaba Mali.[18] Phule also composed words so that members might do their own sraddha ceremonies, and the rites that were customary on the completion of a new house.[19]

4. Ideology and activism in the early Satyashodhak Samaj.

After this brief description of the activities and concerns of the Samaj in the 1870's, we turn now to the attraction that the ideology of the Samaj, and Phule's own ideas, held for the groups that became members or supporters. What follow are initial suggestions for further research.

In the present state of scholarship on the Satyashodhak Samaj, we cannot be certain about the nature of its early support.

17. Reports of the Pune Satyashodhak Samaj for the years 1873 and 1874, Pune 1877, pp. 2-3.

18. Tukaram Hanamant Pinjan to P.S. Patil, Cincavad, 6 February 1928. P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur. This ceremony is the symbolic marriage between the image of Visnu and the sacred Tulasi plant, which is celebrated annually during the month of Kartik in almost every Hindu home.

19. These are reprinted in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 329-339.

However, the overwhelming impression, confirmed in the above description, is that the Samaj was at first an urban movement, but that very often its members had only moved to Pune and Bombay within one or two generations, and that they maintained family contacts outside the urban centres. The examples of Bhalekar and Lokhande spring to mind here. The second impression is that a large proportion of members were of the Mali or Telugu Mali caste. While there were some high caste and Brahman support, this was limited to a few individuals. The third impression is that many of the Samaj's most prominent members were engaged in commerce as merchants and contractors, as were Phule, Bhalekar and many of the Telugu Malis, or were employed in the local administration or had a profession.[20]

First, and most obviously, this social group experienced an incongruity between their secular position of affluence and local respectability, and their objective ritual position as Sudras. Such discrepancies were, of course, by no means unusual in traditional society as individual sub-castes flourished and declined. An adjustment of ritual position was always possible in some form of Sanskritisation, and this option was taken up by some upwardly socially mobile castes in the same period. Yet the intellectual climate of Pune and Bombay was often characterised by a public hostility to traditional Brahman models of behaviour, and by intense debate about individual and social values more generally.

20. Of the list of sixty-three members' names given in The Third Annual Report of the Satyashodhak Samaj, sixteen mention their occupations. These consisted of four doctors, two 'head writers', two 'writers', a head clerk, a police inspector, a police superintendent, a deputy collector, a contractor, a merchant, an overseer and a pensioner. D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 161-163.

This meant that some means of expressing a greater social respectability, as an alternative to Sanskritisation, would find a ready response. Moreover, the sense of disparity itself for this group was heightened by the publicity that was given to the actual contents of Hindu religious texts, especially those that specified the very low ritual status of Sudras, such as Manu's Laws.[21]

Another factor in the attractiveness of Satyashodhak ideas for these groups derived from the evident advantages enjoyed by Brahmans, both in employment in the local institutions of British administration, and in the new political arenas that were being set up around the institutions of British rule. Besides these, the talent of the Mali caste, and of the broader Marathi-kunbi complex, for administrative office and political organising, appeared pitifully deficient. This difference may also have made itself felt at the practical level. As contractors dealing with local government institutions, men like Phule and Bhalekar in Pune and Ayyavaru and Kalewar in Bombay almost certainly came into close contact with Brahman officials and administrators. This would have magnified both their conviction of the economic and social advantages enjoyed by Brahmans, and their feeling of an undue dependence on them.

21. This brings us back to the points made in the discussion of the relationship between the content of ancient Hindu texts and their significance in the construction of latter-day religious hierarchies, that were discussed on pp. 105-112.

Both of these concerns came together in giving Phule's Ksatriya ideology its great appeal. For these early supporters of the Samaj, the idea that their 'real' identity was that of the dispossessed Ksatriyas of ancient India served the social and religious purpose that might otherwise have been met by the claim to a higher conventional ritual status, and by a change in social practices towards a Brahmanic model of behaviour. There was also a strong political dimension to the assertion of Ksatriya status. As we saw in Chapter Three, Pratapsinh Bhosale's insistence on his status as a Ksatriya was nothing less than a claim to the position of secular authority that belonged to a Kingly ruler.[22] It represented an assertion of his own leadership of Hindu society against what he saw as a Citpavan Brahman effort simultaneously to usurp his secular authority, and to undermine its religious legitimation by consigning the Bhosales to the ranks of the Sudras. In asserting an original Ksatriya status for all lower castes, now withheld by conventional Brahmanic religion, Phule and his urban following in the 1870's made the deliberate link with this political dimension of traditional Maratha claims to a Ksatriya ritual status. Lacking the obvious genealogical basis for their arguments that Pratapsinh possessed, they made their claim to a Ksatriya status in the context of the larger argument that the virtues of the warrior and the cultivator had been the central force in the shaping of Maharashtra's traditions and culture. To their representatives in nineteenth century society belonged the position of social and political leadership that Brahmans had assumed, and upon which the latter had consolidated their hold under British rule. These representatives

22. See pp. 53-54.

were the peasant and urban lower castes, the true Ksatriyas of nineteenth century Maharashtra.

This immediately prompts the question as to what connection the lives of merchants and contractors, urbanised and relatively affluent, could have possessed with these elements in Maharashtra's traditional society and culture to give the identification with the warrior and the cultivator any real meaning. Yet there were two vital links. Firstly, as Malis, they did belong to the large body of Maharashtra's cultivator castes with which these traditional occupations were associated, and the period of their urbanisation was relatively short. Secondly, the very nature of their occupations as merchants and contractors meant that they maintained their contact both with the urban environment in which their awareness of injustice was sharpened, and with these aspects of traditional culture in rural society.

This essential duality of the early support of the Satyashodhak Samaj is beautifully illustrated in an anecdote about Phule told by his friend and business colleague, Gyanoba Sasane. Sasane had accompanied Phule to inspect his orchards outside Pune. When all the workers had stopped for their mid-day meal, Phule got up and started to drive the well-bucket himself, singing as he did so. The labourers laughed to see him, whereupon Phule turned to explain. He was just a cultivator in his bones, he said. What was more, all plain cultivators sang at their work. It was only those who did not toil with their hands that had the leisure to sit with musical instruments.[23] The real cultivator had to make his music as he worked.

23. Gyanoba Sasane to P.S. Patil, Hadapasar, 27 May 1930. P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

Chapter Fourteen.

Phule's polemic in the 1880's: the ideological construction of rural life and labour.

1. Introduction.

From the early 1880's, Phule and his colleagues in the Satyashodhak Samaj attempted to extend the organisation and agitation of the Samaj to the rural areas of the Pune, Ahmadnagar and Thana Collectorates and beyond. This move brought Phule the polemicist into a more sustained and direct contact with the communities of kunbi cultivators who had always formed the main focus of his concern. While he had consistently sought to use materials from traditional popular culture, this contact brought a new immediacy into his work.

Phule's earlier work had suggested the illegitimacy of all forms of Brahman power, through his account of ancient Indian history, which was given reality and conviction by its integration with symbols and episodes from contemporary popular culture, and placed within a normative framework that stressed man's natural equality. While these assumptions remained, the emphasis in his attack on Brahman power shifted to a vividly drawn contrast between all those in society who engaged in no physical labour, and those who toiled daily to provide for the material support of the whole of the rest of society. This contrast was made by the slow and painstaking compilation of every detail of the cultivator's existence, in what is certainly the most elaborate and minutely

observed piece of social reporting of agricultural life in the Bombay presidency in the late nineteenth century. Cumulatively, this detail has enormous effect, in providing a criterion of social value concerning the distribution of social and economic resources in society, and in drawing attention to the injustice of a society that reserved its greatest rewards for those furthest from the productive process.

This contrast is also used to suggest the real unity of all those who labour on the land. Such unity flowed from the shared participation in the experiences of rural life and labour, the close involvement with the agricultural cycle, the intense physical toil and frequent hardship borne in common with the whole village community, experiences that at once bound the community together and set them apart from social groups that depended on others for their material support. In his descriptions, Phule literally conjured up for the rural audiences at Satyashodhak gatherings an objectified vision of their own toiling lives. He created, in this picture of honest labour and shared hardship, a powerful symbol for the attraction of common loyalty, and implied a set of social values that emphasised the honesty and co-operativeness of relations within the community. These qualities derived from the very interdependence of the lives of the cultivators, as opposed to the selfishness that characterised the attitudes of Brahman castes. This now stood alongside Phule's earlier attempt to anchor his polemic to the processes of upward social mobility already at work in the Maratha-kunbi caste complex, and to give conviction to the appeal for unity through the revelation of a 'hidden' identity.

This contrast between productive and parasitic groups in society had several great advantages in polemical terms. As symbols, the village and the cultivator were completely concrete. The disadvantage of personalities or events as symbols, such as those upon which Phule's earlier scheme had rested, is that they may change or be forgotten, but the village and the cultivator were fixed and permanent. They were a part of the everyday experience of virtually all rural social groups. No special effort was necessary to create and maintain an awareness of them amongst a potential popular following, and to this extent they may have been rather easier to use and more effective than symbols like Sivaji or Bali.

Secondly, in an agrarian society the symbol of the village and the cultivator would have been immensely powerful. One of the most striking features of political debate in this period, right across the spectrum of political opinion, is the extent to which political groups concerned themselves with the condition of the village cultivator, and their use of this concern to make statements about the relationship between Indian society and the British government. Most notably, of course, the Sarvajanik Sabha and its organisational predecessors took upon themselves the task of reporting agrarian conditions and representing rural grievances to

the British government.[1] Phule's public polemic represented a self-conscious attempt to refute the claims of the Sarvajanik Sabha to be able to understand the plight of the rural communities, and to represent their wishes to the government. His analysis offered quite a different view of the causes of rural poverty and the necessary role of the government in alleviating it. There was even a direct organisational rival to the Sabha, the Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha, the 'Sarvajanik Sabha of the brothers of the poor'.[2] This was run by Phule's colleague Krsnarao Bhalekar. It set out

1. For an account of the Bombay and Pune Associations, and the Sarvajanik Sabha, see S.R. Mehrotra, 'The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha: the Early Phase (1870-1880) in Indian Economic and Social History Review, 6,3, 1969, and J. Masselos, Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in nineteenth century Western India. Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 93-101. The idea of representation and mediation was at the centre of the Sabha's aims. The preamble to its constitution ran 'Whereas it has been deemed expedient that there should exist, between the Government and the people, something in the shape of a mediating body which may afford the latter facilities for knowing the real intentions and objects of Government as well as adequate means of recovering their rights, by making a true representation of the circumstances in which they are placed; for these objects an association has been formed'. Quoted in Masselos, op. cit., p. 96. The term 'Sarvajanik' means 'public' or 'belonging to all the people'.

2. For a brief description of the activities of this Sabha, see Y.D. Phadke, Individuals and Thought, Pune 1979, (Marathi) pp. 61-62.

as its aim to represent the public grievances of the people in a disinterested way to the government, a task which it claimed that the Sarvajanik Sabha was incapable of doing because it represented only the interests of the Brahmans and the higher castes. In this way Phule's polemic, and the organisational efforts of his colleagues, attempted to engage the issue of the very structure of British administration in western India, and its relations with different groups in rural society. While they saw the need to create an organisational rival, their efforts were not limited to a struggle to control existing institutions. They attempted, rather, to point out that the very structure of British administration and of the new political arenas brought into being by its extension, implied great disadvantages for the large social groups without the skills and resources that were necessary to enter them.

The third advantage of Phule's new polemical technique lay in its potential applicability to the British government and its servants. By the 1880's, it is clear that the strong support for British rule that had characterised his earlier work had been replaced with a much more qualified, and in some places overtly hostile, view of its effects on Indian society and the condition of the rural communities. This emerges very strongly in the longest piece of polemical writing that will be examined here, 'The Cultivator's Whip-cord'[3]. Written between 1882 and 1883, it consists of

3. The Marathi word Asud, 'a whip' is rather difficult to translate, since it refers specifically to the very long whip used by the ploughman. Here, I have adopted the translation 'Whip-Cord' used by Phule himself in the English subtitle to the first published edition.

a collection of the speeches and lectures that were read out to the Satyashodhak gatherings in the rural areas in the 1880's. Phule then collected all of these together into a single work in order to present a copy to the Earl of Dufferin, the Governor-General India.[4] With its criticisms of some of the effects of British rule, and its hope of having some effect on British policy by the sheer provision of information, Phule aimed his work at the British policy-makers as well as at the rural audiences of the Satyashodhak Samaj.

4. Phule never published The Cultivator's Whip-Cord because, as he explained in a letter to Mama Paramanand of 2 June 1886, of difficulties with the printing press operated by members of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Jotirao Phule to Mama Paramanand, Pune, 2 June 1886, published in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 325-326. The original manuscript of the work is in the National Library of Calcutta.
In the letter to Mama Paramanand, Phule mentions having made two copies, one to send to Sayajirao, the Maharajah of Baroda, and the other for Sir Frederick Blackwood, the Earl of Dufferin and Viceroy of India. The first two chapters were also published in the Din Bandhu newspaper: P.S. Patil, The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Cikhali, 1927, pp. 92-93 and p. 117. However, it is clear that Phule used the work mainly for the purpose of addressing Satyashodhak and other gatherings. For an account of this publicisation of the work, see pp. 358-359.
The Cultivator's Whip-Cord was first published in 1967, edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe. A copy of this first published edition is in the University Library, Cambridge. All references to the work here, however, are taken from D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule, as cited on p. 6.

2. Labour and loyalty in the community of cultivators.

Phule took great pains to project precisely the details of material life and of a range of social and economic concerns with which a rural audience could identify. He devoted the fourth chapter of The Cultivator's Whip-cord, 'The state of agriculture and of the cultivators today', to exactly this kind of polemical representation. The description is made more immediate and vivid as Phule personalised his account, presenting it in the words of an imaginary cultivator beset with the difficulties of acute poverty and indebtedness. We are introduced to him as he leaves the Collector's tent, which is pitched in comfort in a shady mango grove on the bank of a river, biting his lips in anger and frustration after the Collector has been too absorbed in his tea and his mid-day meal to give proper consideration to his request for an easier arrangement for the payment of his land cess. Phule describes the cultivator's honest and open face, his arms and chest well-developed by his labour in the fields, his worn but carefully arranged cotton clothing, and his air of bewildered desperation. It is worth noting that throughout the presentation of the social experience of the cultivator, Phule never attributes to him the sort of complete social abasement and inhuman material deprivation that he uses to describe the conditions of the untouchable castes. He is certainly very hard up, having run out of temporary expedients for meeting the demands of creditors and revenue officials, and this long drawn out impoverishment has left its mark on his house, family and livestock. But it is clear that he has once been a man of

moderate substance as cultivators went, and that his determination and self-respect were only now beginning to show signs of wearing out. This emphasis on the independence and moderate prosperity of the village cultivator, now attacked and eaten away, rather than the much more extreme social and religious sufferings of the untouchables, reflects the slight shift away from a unity for the lower castes derived from a common historical experience and made explicit in the inclusion of untouchable castes, and towards a solidarity set within a narrower conception of the community of the oppressed, and deriving from shared social experiences.

We follow the cultivator to his house, where he has his meal and lies down to sleep: in vain, however, as his mind starts to fill with thoughts of all his difficulties. These had started when, unlike the other villagers, he had failed to bribe the Brahman official in charge of the revenue assessment, and so the latter had recorded his lands at a greatly increased cess. In the very same year, there was a shortage of rain and all his crops suffered; at the same time, his father had died. The expense of his father's funeral had meant that he had had to borrow from the Brahman moneylender enough to pay that year's cess, and his lands had been pledged against the debt. The moneylender had charged him such a rate of interest that he had been unable to meet the payments, and the Brahman had foreclosed on the debt. It was hopeless for the cultivator to fight the case in court, since the moneylender, the revenue officials, the Collector's staff, the court officials and the head of the local police were all related to one another, or

were caste fellows as Brahmans. The following year he had managed by selling the jewellery of the women in the house, and since then he had borrowed every year from the maravadi[5] in the village, who had also brought cases against him that had lingered in the local courts for years, despite the money spent on bribes to extricate them. He had even resorted to selling his married daughter's jewellery, so that her father-in-law would no longer have her in the house. His mind then turns to the immediate needs of his small-holding: the new leather bucket required for the irrigated land to prevent further dehydration of the sugar crop, the ruin of the maize crop because it was not harvested on time, the weakness of the livestock from lack of food, the embarrassment of the family at going about in clothes too tattered to cover them. In his mind, he turns over the alternatives that are left: if he sold the bullocks, there would be no way of ploughing next year. It was impossible for him to take up a trade because he could not read or write. If they sold up and left their land, he had no skill that would enable him to earn a living elsewhere.

Phule maintains the personal atmosphere in the account, now becoming the observer: 'At last, heaving a great sigh in the midst of his tears, the cultivator fell asleep. I wiped my own eyes, and went to look outside'. This is followed by a most vivid description of the cultivator's house and small-holding, and again the most

5. Maravadis were immigrants to Maharashtra from the Maravad area in the north of Gujurat, and specialised in corn-trading and moneylending.

familiar elements of the social and domestic life of any rural popular audience are recounted and given a strong polemical twist. Phule describes the courtyard filled with broken implements, piles of dung and swept-up rubbish; the storage jars for grain empty and fallen over; the makeshift cowpen with its few thin and mangy inhabitants; a stray dog wandering around, and swarms of flies attracted by the excrement. In the corner, a young woman sits making dung-cakes for fuel, with her legs caked in dirt; an old woman lies on the floor amidst refuse from vegetables, and a baby lies nearby, crying continually and sending a trickle of water across the floor. Older children, with running noses and sores on their skin play games in the mud and filth. The inside of the house portrays the same gradual slide into squalor and poverty, and the sheer loss of will that accompanied it; the dirty oven, with milk spilt around it, and the ashes beneath mixed with excrement from the cat; the walls stained red with betel nut juice and blackened by smoke; the niches in the wall holding leaky stone lamps; old bits of food covered with flies; a pair of worn-out sandals and some old underwear; the dust and cobwebs everywhere. Phule concludes the description here, as the cultivator's aged mother enters, bewailing her family's destitution, and cursing the different kinds of Brahman power that had emerged and reinforced one another within the framework of British rule, from the Brahman priest to the Brahman revenue official, to bring honest families to their knees.[6]

6. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 233-239.

The acute poverty of the cultivator, whose labour supplies all the material needs of society are contrasted vividly with the relatively leisured and prosperous lives of Brahmans in the employ of the British government. Phule describes the meagre diet of the cultivator: the cold left-overs in the morning livened up with a little chutney, the bhakaris with watery lentil dal in the afternoon, and the broken grains of maize or jondhali in the evening;[7] and when even these failed, how the cultivator fills himself up with green mangoes, figs and tamarind, or whatever came to hand in the fields as he went out to pick up the plough.[8] This is followed by a description of a rich Brahman wedding feast, with its special pavilion lit up by electric lights, its extravagant array of rich dishes, and the distribution of daksina to Brahmans afterwards. The emotional appeal here is absolutely blatant. Phule appeals to the women in his audience as he describes the life of ease that Brahman women lead:

> 'Have they ever worked, digging the soil with their own hands? Do they know the pain of working on the land? They never have to help their idle Brahman husbands as the cultivator's wife has to, quickly finishing the smearing of her house with fresh cow-dung, then going to the fields with her husband to take turns with him behind the drill-plough, smoothing and scraping over the soil; then breaking the ears of corn on the threshing floor and making up the piles of grain around the stake in the middle of the floor where the bullock walks; then helping to winnow the corn as it is beaten, handing up the baskets to the men on the winnowing stands; carrying on her head the weight of dusty old baskets of

7. Bhakaris are a form of bread, similar to capatis, but made with flour from the jondhali or sorghum grain, rather than with wheat flour.

8. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 244-245.

> ashes, dung, ordure and wheat straw, and taking work breaking up stones on the road in the heat of the summer when there is less work to do in the fields. Instead, these Brahman women sleep on late in the morning, get up at leisure and do their hair; sweep and wash their houses and do a bit of cooking and washing; and then sit around all day listening to old religious tales and puranas being read to them'. 9.

This lays the ground for a bitter attack on the distribution of social and economic resources in society:

> 'The cultivators feel so ashamed of their poverty that they hesitate to invite the agents of the government and the governor even to take betel nut at their functions. But is it right that he whose labour provides for the armies of the government, the revenue from liqour, for the disproportionate amounts of leisure that are enjoyed by the British officials, and for the inflated pay and pensions and the affectations of ritual purity of the Indian officials, are not even paid this minimum of respect? What can we say when we see that these people often don't even get enough bread to fill their bellies, or clothes to cover their bodies, as they suffer the harsh strokes of government taxes, when we see them reduced to such misery that even the Saheb's hunting dog shrinks away from them?' 10

Besides their labour, the community of cultivators also represented the value of co-operation and honesty and fair dealing to others. This derived from the simple inter-dependence of rural communities, and the spirit of mutual sympathy created by shared social experiences. This at once allowed the projection of a model of social behaviour, and a practical basis for demanding that administrative institutions at the local level, suitably reformed, should be filled from rural society at large, rather than from literate elites whose immediate interests as a social group were

9. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 245.

10. ibid., p. 246.

quite different from those of the cultivators who composed the bulk of the local population. This quality of the rural community emerges in a conversation that Phule reported having held with a visitor. The visitor, who answers Phule's question as to his caste with the claim that he is 'a real Maratha', asks Phule how he can be so sure that if the Brahmans at the local level of administration were replaced with cultivators, they would not exploit their fellows in just the same way. Phule asks the man to imagine that he has just been made Collector: what would be his attitude to his fellow villagers now under his authority? The man realises his dependence on the other members of the rural community, and in a very powerful passage describes the kind of social loyalty that would prevent him from abusing his position:

> 'If I turned against those that I eat with and with whom my family marries, what would be left to my sons and daughters but to take up as religious prostitutes? Their children and my children have grown together all their lives. Their cowsheds and mine are next to each other. Their children and mine play in the same place. We both use the same well. We have the same dams and banks for storing water. We hold our pasture lands in common. In bad times, we share each other's sickles, pestles for pounding rice, snares, ploughshares, ropes, cables and tools. We let each other use our buffaloes, and lend each other our bullocks for ploughing. The women of our families will drop in at any time of day or night to borrow oil, salt or grain. When our women give birth, the others help out with the new baby, and bring round a cot to lend us. Our habits and customs are all the same. We eat similar food and wear the same clothes. Our gods are the same as theirs, and we worship the same family deities. We help each other out if our houses catch fire. Our funeral rites are the same, and we lend each other a hand at buryings, and visit each other's houses with bhakaris and rice water for the ceremonies of appeasement for our children. How could I possibly demand bribes from these people, my caste brothers, and set up feuds for generations to come between our families?' 11

11. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord. D. Keer and S.G.Malshe, pp. 267-268.

To this polemical representation of village society, Phule added an account of its origins, stretching back to the time when primitive man had felt the need for the greater organisation and security of social life. The description of man in his natural state also emphasised the real independence of human nature and intelligence from the artificial structures of social rank. Phule drew his material here from a catholic range of sources, from Charles Darwin to Captain Cook.[12] The account of primitive man, and the realities of human nature in its raw state, were clearly intended to recruit popular science to the range of non-Brahman arguments, and to provide his audience with an instrument for rejecting conventional social hierarchies that, in its objective and purely 'scientific' nature, would simply undercut all arguments in their favour. While his familiarity with the works of Darwin shows that Phule had kept abreast of new ideas in science, his emphasis on the creation of society as a decision by man in his primitive state, reflects the influence of an older tradition. Phule's intellectual debt to Thomas Paine linked his ideas with the English tradition of natural rights thought.[13] A central feature of this tradition, and indeed of political thought in eighteenth century Europe more generally, was this contrast between man in the state of nature and man in society. It was most commonly used in the discussion of

12. Phule quoted from James Cook's Voyages Round the World for his description of man in his primitive state. He only mentions Darwin's name, and does not refer to a particular work.

13. For Phule's debt to Thomas Paine, see pp. 269-276.

man's rights and duties in society, in explaining which rights primitive man had surrendered on his entry to civil society, which rights he retained, and what duties of obedience were imposed on the individual by his contract to enter civil society. These ideas formed the focus of concern for major political thinkers from John Locke in the 1690's to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with his discussion of the problems of rights and obedience in The Social Contract.[14] Although he mentions no specific source for his ideas, Phule was clearly aware of this intellectual tradition, and uses it to great effect.

He deals with this early history of village society in the third part of The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, 'How the Arya Brahmans came out of Iran, and the original lineage of the Sudra cultivators'. It opens with a discussion of human nature, arguing that a humble birth did not necessarily mean a lack of good or noble qualities. Numerous examples showed how men of humble origin had risen to great heights of virtue and courage: in politics, Thomas Paine in Europe and George Washington in America; in battle, the Generals Parker and Merrian in America, and even the examples of Romulus and Remus in founding great kingdoms.[15] Having presented the individual's relation with society, Phule described the various theories about

14. Jean-Jacques Rousseau published his Du Contrat Social in 1762. For a discussion of these problems in Rousseau's work, see Ernst Cassirer, The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, translated and edited by P. Gay, New York, 1954.

15. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 214-125.

man's origin:

> 'We can either say with the Buddhists and Jains that man originated in some primal joining of the elements, or with Darwin that man developed from animals, or with the Christians that man was made from clay by God, or with the Aryan Brahmans that four classes of men sprang from Brahma's limbs'. 16

The very primitiveness of early man disproved orthodox Hindu ideas of his origins. In his naivety and purity, early man had no inherent notion of the complex kinds of ritual and social division that were described in the Vedas, making it, as H.H. Wilson had argued, very unlikely that they represented anything other than a mere contrivance of the Brahmans to gain a livelihood.[17]

Phule turned to early man's first settlement in villages in pursuit of security, and the emergence of different village offices. Here, he is clearly hoping to provide his rural audiences with the rationale and legitimation necessary for a direct attack on Brahman offices in the village, and in particular on the power of the kulkarni. Those in the state of nature who were courageous enough to strike out on their own and found new villages were called patil and desmukh: and even though the ignorant patils and desmukhs of

16. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 215.

17. ibid., p. 217. Besides the work of H.H. Wilson, Phule also draws on John Wilson's India Three Thousand Years Ago, published in 1858, on John Muir's Original Sanskrit Texts, published between 1858 and 1863, on Max Muller's Lectures on the Origins and Growth of Religion, as illustrated by the Religions of India, published in 1878, and on Sir William Jones' much earlier work, The Institutes of Hindu Law, or the Ordinances of Menu, published in 1796, for his account of Indian society in Vedic times.

today's villages were completely subject to the Brahman kulkarni, the other villagers still obeyed them out of reverence for their ancient office.[18] The panca had been developed as pressure on the land increased, and some mechanism was necessary to resolve conflicts. The inhabitants of the village also banded together to protect themselves against the gangs of robbers and bandits that had gown up with the settlement of villages, who preferred to live outside these early communities and to prey on their honest labour. The villagers decided to impose taxes on themselves to pay for the appointment of full-time soldiers, and nominated tahasiladars and caprasis to collect the taxes.[19] In this way, order and prosperity spread throughout India. For India, Phule uses the term 'Balisthan' rather than 'Hindustan', thus maintaining the link with the figure of King Bali.[20]

18. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 218. A desmukh is the holder of a hereditary estate in the village.

19. ibid., pp. 220-221. A tahasiladar is a collector of revenue in charge of the sub-division of a district. A caprasi is a messenger or office servant.

20. Govind Ganapat Kale, one of the younger members of the Satyashodhak Samaj recruited by Phule, recalled that Phule always called India 'Balisthan', 'the country of Bali', in conscious opposition to its name 'Bharat Varsa', signifying India as having been the kingdom of Bharata, the great king of Hindu mythology from whom were descended the Pandava and Kaurava families who fought the great war that forms the subject of the Mahabharata epic.
Govind Ganapat Kale to P.S. Patil, Hadapsar, 21 November 1940, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

The office of the kulkarni, however, had come into existence only after the disruption of the peaceful communities of Balisthan by the Aryan invaders:

> 'The Aryans gave the office of kulkarni in every village to people like Pralhad amongst the original inhabitants, who were feeble and cowardly and never supported the cause of their own countrymen, and who had never opposed the Brahmans, and took them into their confidence, hoping in this way to get the land that they had conquered properly administered. This is why we have grown used to calling them Desastha Brahmans, and we can all see that the appearance, customs, and objects of worship of the Desastha Brahmans and the original Sudras are the same, while the Desastha and Konkanastha Brahmans have to this day never interdined or intermarried with each other'. 21

In this way, Phule hoped to make the office of the kulkarni into a daily and living reminder of the original expropriation of the Sudras for his rural audiences.

3. Ksatriya ideology and Maratha identity in the 1880's.

In his account of the historical origins of village society, Phule was able to resolve an internal contradiction in his earlier writing: that between his assertion that the term Ksatriya derived from the pre-Aryan society of flourishing peasants, and its clear

21. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 224. The Desastha and Konkanastha or Citpavan Brahmans are two of the most important sub-castes of Brahmans in Maharashtra. In the nineteenth century, the first were usually village kulkarnis. The second were usually court or government employees in urban centres, following their tradition of administrative service established under the peshwas, who were, of course, Citpavan Brahmans. See Maureen L. Patterson, 'Changing Patterns of Occupation among Chitpavan Brahmans' in Indian Economic and Social History Review, 3, 7, 1970.

association with the high-status varna of conventional Hinduism. Phule overcame this by arguing that the original Ksatriyas, the ancestors of the Marathas of the ninety-six families[22] had, like the Aryans come from Iran, but that they had come as friends and had lived in harmony with the Sudra kingdoms already established, even helping them to resist the subsequent Aryan attacks:

> 'The representatives of the ninety-six families from Iran each established their own kingdoms, and by all co-operating with each other they managed their political affairs without any difficulty, and so for hundreds of years there was nothing to spoil their prosperity, and in the kingdoms of the Dasyus, Astiks, Ahirs, Agras, Pisacas and Matangs, all the people were very happy, and the dust of gold seemed to hang in the very air'. [23]

In this way, the apparently 'Aryan' overtones of the Ksatriya status, are explained, while the term still retains anti-Brahman overtones.

That Phule felt that this kind of clarification was necessary is an indication of the importance of Ksatriya ideology to the rural audiences of the Satyashodhak Samaj. As we shall see in the next chapter, arguments of Ksatriya status and Maratha identity featured strongly in non-Brahman polemic in the 1880's, and these arguments seemed at times perilously close to a simple Sanskritizing claim. Phule's colleague, Bhau Kondaji Patil, was to use the argument of Ksatriya identity and Maratha status as a conscious strategy for the recruitment of support amongst rural audiences.

22. For the examination of this area of Maratha social structure, see pp. 23-60.

23. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 221. Phule took the argument that Brahmans and Ksatriyas were in many cases descended from the same stock from John Muir's Original Sanskrit Texts on the Origin and Progress of the Religion and Institutions of India, London 1868-1871, Vol II. p. 310 and p. 355. This was also a reply to the objections of the reviewer of his earlier work Slavery, described on p. 307.

The whole issue was to become closely bound up with the spread of claims to a Maratha status throughout the entire Maratha-kunbi caste complex, and to a range of associated artisan and agricultural castes. The shift in the derivation of the term Ksatriya also prepared the way for a partial rehabilitation of the idea of an 'Aryan' origin. Phule's colleague, the non-Brahman polemicist Vasudev Lingoji Birje, was thus able to argue in his popular work, Who are the Marathas?, published in 1896, that the Marathas were Arya Ksatriyas in origin, but to do so without sacrificing any of the essential hostility of non-Brahman arguments to the hierarchies of Brahmanic religion.[24]

Phule himself always remained much more ambivalent towards the claim to a Maratha identity. His revised interpretation of the term Ksatriya clearly allowed the idea of a Ksatriya status to slip back into its older association with an elite Maratha identity. It is possible that he was prepared to see this happen, and thus to link his own claim to a Ksatriya status for all Sudras with the argument that they could also identify themselves as Marathas. This had a clear ideological appeal. On the other hand, the idea of a Maratha status as a part of the identity of a non-Brahman community had very clear drawbacks. In practice, its actual adoption by particular sub-castes set up far more social barriers

24. Vasudev Lingoji Birje was another of the younger generation of Satyashodhak workers, who edited the Din Bandhu newspaper for a while and eventually became Librarian to Sayajirao, the Maharajah of Baroda.

within the lower caste community than its existence as a symbol for the creation of popular solidarity and loyalty could have broken down. In the decades after Phule's death, numerous sub-castes were to claim the title 'Maratha' for themselves, as they formed associations for the social and educational welfare of the caste, and more were to claim a Maratha status of some kind in the decennial Census Reports of the Bombay presidency.[25] Yet the adoption of the title 'Maratha' by a particular caste association usually represented not the affirmation of solidarity within a wider community defined as 'Maratha': rather, it was precisely the attempt to distinguish the caste from the larger mass of non-Brahman castes defined as Sudra, and to associate it with the status and attributes of the traditional elite families.[26] This was evident in that the assumption of a Maratha status and identity was often accompanied by the Sanskritisation of some social practices. Tarabai Sinde, a woman Satyashodhak activist and polemicist of the 1880's, complained in her work entitled

25. See pp. 361-366 for further discussion of these issues.

26. It was not until the second or third decade of the twentieth century that the term 'Maratha' lost its elite associations. Even then, it is doubtful whether it operated in a value-free way to describe all agricultural castes.

A comparison between men and women, [27] that the tolerance of widow remarriage in the Maratha-kunbi complex of castes was in danger, since the rapid spread of claims to Maratha status was almost always accompanied by the prohibition of widow remarriage as families sought to bring their practices into line with a more orthodox Hindu interpretation of the customs appropriate for a Ksatriya varna status. [28]

27. Tarabai Sinde, A comparison between men and women, Buladhana 1882. (Marathi). This work examined the differences between the natures of men and women, and concluded that the conventional Hindu view of women as morally weak was quite unfounded; rather, the course of human history showed that most human suffering and difficulty arose from the pride and aggressiveness of men. This work provided one of the issues over which Phule and Krsnarao Bhalekar quarrelled. Bhalekar had attacked Tarabai's work, and in reply Phule set out a stinging and very personal attack on Bhalekar, in the second of his Essence of Truth pamphlets. See D. Keer and S.G Malshe, pp. 295-304, and the brief discussion on the relationship between the two on p. 311.

28. There is other indirect evidence that the growing number of claims to a Maratha status within the larger caste complex in this period was accompanied by some Sanskritisation of social practice, and that this gave rise to confusion about proper social norms amongst Marathas themselves, and to criticism from non-Brahmans. The question of meat-eating posed a particular problem. The Satyashodhak activist H.N. Navalakar published a pamphlet in 1890 entitled Animal Food; whether the use of animal food is based on reason and philosophy, (Marathi), arguing that expert opinion in the west had shown that man flourished best when he included meat in his diet, that Hindu vegetarianism was based only on religious prejudice, and that in any case, the Vedas showed that meat-eating had been common in Vedic society, and that animal sacrifice was regarded as a religious duty. On the other hand, Nilakantharao Khalatakar, a conservative desmukh from eastern Maharashtra argued in a pamphlet published in 1907, The customs of the Ksatriya Marathas and the means for their improvement, (Marathi), that it would be better if Marathas gave up eating meat. It was certainly the dharma of Ksatriyas to hunt and eat their kill, and this had been all right in the days when this was possible. But now Marathas were reduced to eating chickens and goats, which even educated Mahars and Mangs had given up, so that it would be better not to associate themselves with behaviour that might bring contempt upon the caste. What is really at issue here is the conflict between the models of behaviour deemed appropriate for Brahmans (representing abstention from meat) and Ksatriyas, and the latter's loss of social credibility before Brahmanic models of behaviour by which even untouchable castes were affected.

Throughout The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, then, Phule made a point of deprecating the claims to Maratha status that accompanied much non-Brahman activity towards the end of the century. He described the assumption of the sacred thread amongst kunbis, lamenting their failure to realise how all social divisions were part of the same engine for social oppression:

> 'On the full moon day, on the pretext of its being the month of Sravan, the Brahmans put the white sacred thread instituted by Gagabhat around the necks of some pretentious kunbis, and the kunbis now fail to read the warning in the Mahars having to wear a black thread to signify their low status'. 29

The Sudras had never worn a sacred thread until Gagabhat had confirmed a Ksatriya status for Sivaji.[30] It is also worth noting that Phule regarded claims to a conventional Ksatriya and Maratha status to be a typical mark of the kind of middle-rank cultivator that we saw him describe in the early part of this chapter -

> 'the ignorant and hopelessly indebted kunbi in the community of the Mali, kunbi or dhangar cultivators, who, just because his great-grandfather's mother's sister, or his father's grandfather's daughter was given in marriage to a legitimate or even an illegitimate son in the house of Sinde or the Gaekwads, goes about bragging and pretending to everyone that he is a real Maratha'. 31

In an appendix to The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, Phule also recorded a conversation with 'one who calls himself a real Maratha'. He had just finished work on the second part of the book, when he had an unexpected visitor, a man that he was unable to place by his dress

29. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 196.

30. idem.

31. ibid., p. 233.

or his manner. On enquiry, the man tells him that he is a Maratha of a Maratha family. Phule dismisses this pretention to an elite status: 'All classes of people in Maharashtra get called Maratha, from the Mahars to the Brahmans, and so you have really told me nothing about which particular caste you belong to'.[32] At length, the man says that he is a kumbi.

Linked with this deprecation of claims to a conventional Maratha status were arguments about the actual social representatives of that status, the ruling Maratha families of western India. As potential leaders and patrons of a lower caste community, Phule was concerned with what he saw as the degeneracy of families like the Sindes, Holkars, Bhosales and Gaekwads. In the introduction to The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, he argued that they had forgotten at what a cost the founders of their families had won their lands, wealth and reputation. Instead of devoting themselves to their ancestral duties, which was the leadership of the Sudra communities of western India, and their proper education to meet the political challenges of the future, the princely families gave themselves up to a life of pleasure, squandered their wealth and allowed their real political power to fall into the hands of their Brahman ministers, who were only too pleased to see their masters dissipate themselves in this way. Again and again, he stressed that their own lack of education had contributed most to the decline of the princely families of the Marathas, with Sivaji himself as the outstanding

32. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe. p. 266.

example.[33] In this way, the apparent impoverishment and political impotence of the princely families was linked with an even longer tradition, of brave warriors rendered politically helpless when conventional Hindu attitudes discouraged them from educating themselves.

4. Brahman power and rural society in the 1880's.

In his public polemic of the early 1880's, Phule restated much of his earlier material concerning Brahman power in the religious lives of the cultivators, Brahmans in the British administration, and the idea of an unseen community of interest between different areas of Brahman activity. What was new was his concern at the apparently rapid growth of organised political pressure groups, with the intensification of the activities of the Bombay and Pune Associations in the late 1860's, and the formation of the Sarvajanik Sabha in 1870. With their predominantly Brahman membership; their organisation both at the local and the provincial level; and the assumption of their leadership that their effectiveness in influencing the British government would depend on their claim that they represented not merely their own opinions, but the voice of the people of western India, Phule clearly felt that they represented a serious threat to lower caste hopes of using

33. Phule had send a copy of The Cultivator's Whip-Cord to the Maharaja of Baroda, and went to see the young Maharaja shortly after his installation in 1881, to exhort him to fulfil his duties in the leadership and education of the lower castes. P.S. Patil, The Life of Mahatma Phule, pp. 121-124.

British rule to bring about a substantial alteration in the distribution of political power and economic resources in western Indian society. What seemed to be at the heart of Phule's objection concerned these bodies as institutions. He felt that their ability to concentrate and give formal expression to opinion, and to maximise support by active organisation, would give groups with the skills and resources to do this a far greater ability to engage both the attention, and the institutions, of the British government. Disagreement over immediate policies for social welfare were not the issue, so much as whether the social groups that dominated the Sarvajanik Sabha should assume the strategic political position of intermediaries between the British government and Indian society, a role that the Sabha specifically claimed for itself in its constitution. It seemed a matter of little doubt that a body claiming as wide a representative character as the Sarvajanik Sabha, and with as widespread a network of local contacts, would be in a better position to make its demands heard by government, and to project its own vision of the future of India's political institutions.

Phule tried to undermine the position of the Sarvajanik Sabha by pointing out its predominantly Brahman composition, and placing that fact alongside all the other tactics for the maintenance of the political and ideological hegemony of Brahman social groups that he had already described. The formation of Sabhas at the local level acted to extend the ideology of Brahman political

leadership to lower caste groups:

> 'In order to extend their influence, some cunning Brahman officials encourage mischievous and loud-mouthed Brahmans in the localities to come forward and set up important sounding societies in different places, and secretly apply their influence to the local Sudra cultivators, grass-sellers and wood-cutters, contractors, pensioners and estate managers, and get them to become members of these societies'. 34.

Phule criticised the calls for unity amongst all Hindus that formed a large part of the public propagandising of the Sarvajanik Sabha:

> 'The Brahmans have hidden away the sword of their religion, which has cut the throat of the people's prosperity and now go about posing as great patriots of their country. They don't bother with the Mangs and Mahars, but use their books, newspapers and societies to give this advice to the best of our Sudra, Muslim and Parsi youth, that unless we put aside all quarrelling amongst ourselves about the divisions between high and low in our country, and come together with one heart and mind, then our unfortunate country will never make any progress'. 35

This, however, was the real meaning behind the appeals for unity:

> 'It will be unity so long as it serves their purposes, and then it will be me here and you over there again. It's just like the old saying: we'll eat your seed-corn, and use mine for planting - this is how the Brahmans look after themselves. But if our learned Aryans really want to build unity amongst all the people, and improve the country, then they will have to get rid of this vile religion of winners and losers'. 36.

34. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord. D. Keer and S.G. Malshe. p. 213.

35. ibid., pp. 254-255.

36. ibid., p. 259.

While Brahmans held on to a sense of their religious superiority, it was impossible for any Sudra to make common cause with them.

Phule also took umbrage at the image of the cultivators that emerged from the reports of the Sabha on the state of agriculture in the Deccan, and in particular its representation of them as wilfully ignorant and chronically spendthrift:

> 'If the leaders of the Sarvajanik Sabha were to put aside the blinkers that the pride of Hindu caste puts upon their eyes, and look properly at the condition of the cultivators, then they would not dare to call ignorant the poor unfortunate cultivators who have been so troubled and deceived by the prohibitions of a prejudiced religion'.[37]

After his description of the poverty of the cultivator's wedding feast, he exclaimed:

> 'In spite of the pitiful weddings that the cultivators have, our supposedly intelligent Brahmans in their Sabhas, who lack the proper information, have put about a complete myth, and told the British government that the cultivators are so heavily in debt because they squander all their money at the weddings of their children. Has this Sabha, with its empty claims to a public name, made a single cultivator of the Mang or the Mahar caste one of its members and taken him to sit alongside the others?'. 38

Phule also directed heavy criticism at the societies for

37. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 202. In 1872, the Sarvajanik Sabha had appointed a sub-committee of its members to enquire into the condition of agriculture in the Deccan, with the aim of informing the Parliamentary Committee on Indian finance then at work. See S.R. Mehrotra op. cit., p. 306-307.

38. ibid., p. 245.

religious reform, the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj.[39] With their predominantly Brahman membership he felt that they represented the religious equivalent of the Brahman attempt to establish a provincial level of political leadership and organisational and ideological control of lower caste groups. Phule dealt with the issues of the religious doctrine, social composition, and institutional form of the religious reform societies, in two issues of an abortive periodical that he started in 1885, entitled The Essence of Truth.[40] In the same pamphlets, he also defended Pandita Ramabai against her attackers after her conversion to Christianity in 1883.[41] The pamphlets are organised in the form

39. See the references to the Prarthana Samaj on pp. 134 and 142. The Brahmo Samaj was the Bengal religious reform society originally established by Ram Mohan Ray in 1828: see D. Kopf, The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind, Princeton University Press 1979.

40. These two pamphlets are in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, The Collected Works of Mahatma Phule. In the introduction to the first one, Phule says that since a few Sudras and ati-Sudras are now able to read and write, it was worth trying to bring out an occasional publication to illustrate the depravities of Brahmanic religion: D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 280. In the introduction to the second, he records that the rapid sale of the first one - 1050 copies out of 2,000 printed within a month - has enabled him to publish the second: ibid., p. 294.

41. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati was the Citpavan Brahman who, after the death of her husband in 1882, devoted her life to social and religious reform with a special concern for Hindu women, and was baptised in England in September 1883. See. S.M. Adhav, Pandita Ramabai, Christian Literature Society, Madras 1979.

of a dialogue between a Sudra and a Brahman of the Brahmo Samaj, whom the Sudra pursues mercilessly over the matter of doctrine. He asks the Brahman which 'Brahma' the Samaj really regarded as the true one: the one from whose limbs the four varnas had sprung; the one who had given birth to Manu, the author of so many shameful books, or whether some clever sophist amongst the Brahmos had given the name 'Brahma' to the real original Creator of the universe, who preceded all these merely human constructs. The Brahman asserts that the aim of the Brahmo and Prarthana Samajes was to cull the the truth from every religion, Hindu, Christian and Muslim, and act according to it, but confesses rather lamely that no actual doctrine has been arrived at yet. The Sudra's reply brings out the acute consciousness of religious doctrine as the basis for social hierarchies that we have seen as a characteristic of a wide variety of non-Brahman polemic:

> 'Why should we Sudras and ati-Sudras, any more than Pandita Ramabai, put any trust in what you say, until you Brahmos have prepared such a book? Because another bold trouble-maker like Parasuram or Nana peshwa might come along at any time, and lend his weight to another devilish Brahman like Sankaracaraya, who would tell us once again that everything written in the books of the Aryan Brahmans came from God: and what power would the Mangs and Mahars have to refute them?' 42.

From doctrine, the dialogue turns to the religious composition of the Samajes, and once again Phule tries to undermine the claim that the Samajes had broken away, ideologically at least, from the traditional structures of caste. The Sudra asks: 'If all you Brahmos have no regard for the divisions of caste, then how is it

42. Jotirao Phule, The Essence of Truth. D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 284.

that you have not taken any Mahars and Mangs into your Samaj?'.[43]

5. Rural society under British rule.

Phule applied the contrast between productive and parasitic groups with equal rigour to British institutions. In economic terms, he felt that British rule had only exacerbated the problems of poverty and indebtedness amongst the cultivators.[44] However, he was less concerned with simply deprecating the effects of British rule, as with presenting an account of the unequal distribution of resources between those who laboured on the land and those who did not, which would include his more general analysis of the nature of Brahman power, and leave room for a positive role for a reformed British administration.

Phule was most stringent in his criticism of the British government in its setting up of a high administrative superstructure,

43. Jotirao Phule, The Essence of Truth, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 284.

44. Phule put forward various criticisms of British economic policies and their effects on rural society. Amongst the most important were the frequent and exhorbitant increases in land revenue demands, the depression of Indian crafts and manufactures through the import of British goods, the enormous interest charged on the Indian debt, the withdrawal of the employment opportunities that had existed under native governments for the younger sons of cultivators, thus increasing the pressure on the land, and the imposition of government restrictions on what had used to be common resources, such as the forests and rivers. For an introduction to the debate over the effects of British policy on the Indian economy and agriculture, see N. Charlesworth, British Rule and the Indian Economy, Economic History Society Studies in Economic and Social History, Macmillan Press 1982.

composed both of European and of Brahman officials, the one incompetent and the other corrupt, who enjoyed comfortable salaries and pensions, all of which had to be paid for by the labour of the cultivators. There was a direct link between the size of the superstructure, and the poverty of the cultivators, because of the weight of taxes that it imposed:

> 'Unless the Governor-General makes a recommendation to the Government at home that in all the Government Departments - Justice, Forest, Police, and Education to reduce the pay and pensions of all who get more than one hundred rupees, then the cultivator will never get enough bread to fill himself and clothes to cover his body, and will never raise himself out of debt. The cultivator and his wife and children labour in the fields day and night, but after the land cess and the local fund, each person in the family is left with less than three rupees; while the very ordinary Indian and European government official cannot manage on fifteen rupees a month for his miscellaneous expenses and his drink'. 45

Even the local taxes, which were collected in part for the purpose of local education, went to support education institutions from which Brahman children derived most benefit.[46]

The incompetence of some European officials added to the cultivators' difficulties. Often, they were more concerned with their own comfort than with gaining accurate information about rural society. Their inability to speak Marathi meant that they relied heavily on their subordinate officials, who often had their own schemes of extortion and personal aggrandizement. The

45. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 231.

46. ibid., p. 264.

inspection of crops for the granting of exemptions, for example, was often delegated to a Brahman official:

> 'With the help of the merciless kulkarni of the village, the ritually pure official takes along the ignorant and timid patil and a few drunken thugs, and carries out the inspection for the exemption himself'. 47

And, Phule implies, it was not difficult to imagine how they would go about granting exemptions.

Despite these shortcomings, Phule called for a more active role for a reduced British administration in changing the very structure of rural society. The children of the cultivators should be given a proper education in agricultural techniques. The office of the patil should no longer be hereditary, but should be conferred upon whichever candidate could show himself most proficient in using the plough, the harrow and the hoe, and in the personal virtues of honesty and reliability. In the resulting competition, cultivators would be only too eager to send their children to school, and with overall levels of education rising, the influence of both priest and kulkarni in the village would be diminished.[48]

Phule had set up a standard of justice in society by which all those who did not labour to earn their living appeared as parasites. This was to open the way for the growth of hostility to the moneylender, the Setaji, that was to become so important in non-Brahman polemic in the 1890's and after. To some extent, this move itself reflected the more general spread of the non-Brahman

47. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 249.

48. ibid., pp. 260-261.

movement from its early base amongst first-generation urban and commercial groups, to the rural centres and to those more directly engaged in village agriculture. However, Phule himself remained overwhelmingly concerned with the oppressions of orthodox Brahmanic religion itself, and did not really focus on the moneylender in his writing. Indeed, he criticised the Agricultural Relief Act of 1879, which had followed on from the Deccan Riots of 1875 and the Bombay Government Report into their causes.[49] The British government had little justification for its attack on the interest charged by a few poor village moneylenders, while imposing a huge rate of interest on the Indian debt.[50] Where exploitation by the moneylender did occur, Phule felt that it was rather the fault of the administrative machinery that allowed it. The effect of the Act of 1879 had merely been that 'no self-respecting moneylender will now let a cultivator even stand at his door'.[51]

6. Rural ideology and untouchable social groups.

In his earlier writing, Phule had included untouchables in the lower caste community as the touchstone of a genuinely caste-free society. It is evident from his organisational work right up to his death in 1890 that he never lost his concern and contact with

49. For an account of the Deccan riots of 1875 and their aftermath, see N. Charlesworth, 'The Myth of the Deccan Riots of 1875' in Modern Asian Studies, 6,4,1972.

50. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 230-231.

51 ibid. p. 209

the emergent movements of protest amongst untouchable groups.[52] However, he seems to have felt that the difficulties of the cultivators and those of the untouchables demanded a somewhat different approach, even though both derived at base from Brahmanic religion itself. At the end of his work Slavery he explained:

> 'I have not concerned myself at all in this work either with the important princes and notables among the Sudras, nor with the pitiable condition of the untouchables. The reason for this is the empty pride of the former, and the very distance of the latter from the Sudra cultivators, through their greater misfortunes'. 53

Phule set out this separate analysis in an unpublished work, The Tale of the Untouchables, designed to illustrate the sheer misery of their material conditions of life, and the less than

52. One of the first leaders and spokesmen of these movements was Gopal Baba Valangakar, a Mahar from the village of Ravadula near Mahad in the Konkan. He had joined the army and received a rudimentary education. While his battalion was stationed in Pune, he came into close contact with Phule who frequently campaigned for support amongst the Mahar sections of the army. In 1888, Valangakar published a pamphlet The Elimination of Untouchability, and in the same year founded a society, 'The Society for Removing the Stigma of non-Aryan Origins'. Although in his pamphlet Valangakar suggested that untouchables were originally Ksatriyas who had become polluted by eating meat during times of famine, there was a clear tension here with the tendency of other non-Brahman polemicists to equate the Ksatriya status with an Aryan origin, even though this was done within a broader framework of hostility to conventional Hindu hierarchies. For an account of movements amongst untouchable groups from the end of the nineteenth century, see Eleanor Zelliot, 'The Nineteenth Century Background of the Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra' in Indian Economic and Social History Review, 3, 7, 1970.

53. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe., p. 264.

human status that had always been accorded them within Hindu society.[54] However, it is clear that he never gave up the ideological attempt to include all non-Brahman castes within a broader identity defined as Ksatriya, despite the more general tendencies of non-Brahman polemic from the 1890's. R.S. Ghadge, a retired Mahar Subhedar recalled how, when he was stationed in Pune in 1887, Phule used to come and address the Mahar regiment every Sunday, where he drew audiences of fifty or seventy-five people. Ghadge heard him read the third part of The Cultivator's Whip-Cord and argue that the Mahars and Mangs were bold warrior Ksatriyas who had been deceived and despised for thousands of years by the Brahmans.[55]

54. This manuscript is in the P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur. I have not attempted to examine it in detail yet, since the separate concern with untouchables falls outside the immediate scope of this thesis.

55. R.S. Ghadge to P.S. Patil, Pune 29 May, 1930. P.S. Patil MSS., Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

Chapter Fifteen.

Ideology and activism in the 1880's.

1. Introduction.

From this examination of the writings and speeches that Phule prepared in the early 1880's, we turn now to a brief outline of the kinds of organisation and propaganda that the Satyashodhak Samaj spread to the smaller provincial centres in the Deccan and Konkan. These campaigns reflected Phule's emphasis upon honest labour as the criterion of social worth. They included the attack upon and boycott of village moneylenders as well as Brahmans, both of whom were seen as parasites upon the physical toil of the cultivator. The 1880's also saw a growing pre-occupation with claims to a Maratha identity, as well as to a Ksatriya status, as Phule's ideological concerns passed into the hands of a new generation of non-Brahman polemicists.

2. Propaganda and ritual in rural campaigning.

In the introduction to The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, Phule expresses his gratitude to 'the Sudra gentlemen in Pune, Bombay, Thana, Junnar, Otur, Hadapasar, Vangani and other places who have heard me read from this book on several occasions'.[1] However, it was in Junnar Taluka, some sixty miles directly to the north of Pune, that Satyashodhak campaigning found its first large rural

1. Jotirao Phule, The Cultivator's Whip-Cord, D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, p. 191.

response. Bhau Kondaji Patil, a local leader from Otur in Junnar Taluka, a small village with a population of under two thousand, heard something of Phule's work and went to meet him in Pune in 1882. He invited Phule to come to speak in Otur and the surrounding villages. Patil's brother, Govind Bhau Patil, described one of Phule's speeches at a gathering that he attended. There were about fifteen hundred people present. Phule urged that when they returned to their villages, they should impose a boycott on the local Brahmans while the latter held on to their ideas of superior religious purity. The service castes should refuse to visit them, labourers should refuse to till their fields, and the Malis should withhold supplies of fruit and vegetables from them. Similar action should be taken against tyrannical and usurious moneylenders. Speeches such as these, made by Phule, Bhau Kondaji Patil, and their colleagues as they toured Junnar Taluka in 1883, had a considerable effect. The village cultivators boycotted the Brahmans and moneylenders, refusing to till their fields, and performing their own religious ceremonies themselves. The boycott also had the effect of bringing down the prices that Brahman priests charged for the performance of the marriage service, and decreasing the rent that Brahman landlords charged for the lease of their fields. Govind Bhau Patil also recalled that this action had prompted a retaliation by the local Brahman community. Brahman masters in the village schools refused to teach the children of the cultivators, so Bhau Kondaji Patil opened an independent school for the children of cultivators in Otur, with a staff of non-Brahman teachers.[2]

2. Govind Bhau Patil to P.S. Patil, Pune 26 May 1931, P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

There was a great emphasis in these rural campaigns upon the performance of ritual without Brahman aid. The Din Bandhu newspaper reported that Maratha families in the Junnar Taluka had started to perform their own sacred thread ceremonies, when the time for their annual renewal came up in the month of Sravan.[3] In 1884, one Balaji Kesaji Patil of Otur had his daughter's marriage performed without a Brahman, whereupon the Brahman priests of Otur filed a suit, claiming that they were entitled to a marriage fee whether or not they had actually conducted the ceremony. Phule and Patil fought the case all the way to the High Court in Bombay, arguing that no fees could be claimed since none of the traditional rites were carried out. A proclamation put out by Phule, Bhau Kondaji Patil, Narayanrao Lokhande and others, just as the case was going to the High Court, gives an idea of the tone of Satyashodhak propaganda here:

> 'All the followers of the Hindu religion, especially Marathas, Malis, kunbis, Kolis, Dhangars and other castes, are informed by this letter that the Brahmans take and squander money from our people at weddings, religious ceremonies and at the time of other auspicious and inauspicious rites. For these reasons, and because the Hindu Sastras allow full authority for each man to perform his own rituals in religion, people of the above castes in several areas have for some time been carrying out their own ceremonies without the aid of Brahmans. However, the Brahmans do not like this, because it means that they lose the produce and goods that they otherwise receive without having to sweat and toil'.[4]

3. Din Bandhu (Marathi) 15 April 1888. See also Phule's reference to the same practice on p. 344.

4. This proclamation is reprinted in D. Keer and S.G. Malshe, pp. 275-276.

The High Court in Bombay returned the verdict in favour of Phule's party in 1888.[5] In the same period, the Satyashodhak Samaj also became involved in agitations by the Nhavi or barber caste, and by the Mahadev Kolis of Thana, against Brahmanic religious practices, and in the protests of cultivators against moneylender landlords.[6]

3. Ksatriya ideology and Maratha identity in non-Brahman polemic.

Through its evocation of much earlier Maratha demands for a Ksatriya ritual status, the Satyashodhak proclamation, of a Ksatriya identity for the entire Maratha-kunbi caste group, sought to return to the latter the position of social power and political leadership that seemed to have been usurped by Brahmans. This attempt was based on the idea that Maharashtra's peasant and cultivating castes were the natural inheritors of the major cultural forces that had shaped its history and tradition. In this drive towards the reinterpretation of the past, Phule had always tried to avoid the direct appropriation of the term 'Maratha' for specifically non-Brahman social groups, even though he had endeavoured to identify with the latter many of the attributes that had been associated with the Maratha identity in traditional culture.[7] As

5. For an account of this legal battle, see Dhananjay Keer, Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, pp. 205-208.

6. For a brief account of these agitations, on which very little work has been done, see Gail Omvedt, Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873-1930, Bombay 1976, pp. 139-142.

7. For the discussion of this issue, see pp. 340-346.

we saw in Chapter Ten, polemicists from other points of the political spectrum showed no such diffidence where the term 'Maratha' was concerned.

It was under the impact of this growing politicisation of the term 'Maratha' that non-Brahman polemicists from the mid-1880's occupied themselves increasingly in claiming not only a Ksatriya, but a Maratha Ksatriya identity for Maharashtra's landowning, peasant and cultivating castes. This linked, much more directly, the political assertion of Ksatriya ideology with the interpretation of the dominant cultural role of the Maratha identity on which Ksatriya ideology was based. Automatically, the linkage also precluded a Brahman share in this identity.

From the mid-1880's, numerous 'Maratha' self-help groups grew up, with the emphasis on education, social reform and the awakening of all Marathas to a proper sense of their common purpose and their rightful position in society. In 1887, Lokhande helped form the 'Society for Maratha Unity'. The Society concerned itself with the remedy of what it saw as the evil effects of Brahmanic religious values upon non-Brahman castes, especially in the setting up of divisions between them and in discouraging them from education. Lokhande was also active in the Maratha Relief Committee, in raising funds for projects of education and reform amongst Marathas.[8] The most important of these groups, however, was the 'Society of the Maratha Caste' for putting forward the dharma of Ksatriyas and for the encouragement of fund-raising for

8. These two bodies reported their activities in the Din Bandhu during the 1890's. See, for example, the Din Bandhu of 11 January 1895 for a report of a meeting of the Society for Maratha Unity, and the Din Bandhu of 1 April 1894 for a report on the Maratha Relief Committee.

that dharma'. The Society was founded in August 1882 in Bombay. Its president was one Tukaramaji Haraji Patil Salunkhe, and its secretary was Banaji Bapujirao Angane.[9] By 1886, when it published the first report of its activities, the Society could show a total of nine hundred and sixty-seven contributors to its funds, whose names appear in the back of the report. Although much less overtly anti-Brahman than the Satyashodhak Samaj, the report records how the Society held joint gatherings with the Samaj, and in the introduction expresses its thanks to Lokhande for his help in preparing the report.

While the Society was concerned with practical social projects, its main purpose, reflected in its title, was to define the social group that might call itself Maratha Ksatriya, and publicise their proper position in society. Like Lokhande's Society, it did not apply strict criteria in the application of the term 'Maratha' within the broader caste complex. Marathas were all those who still looked after their own land, and took pride in protecting it.[10] However, the report recorded a strong reluctance in the Society to see the term extended to other groups. It criticised the historian Grant Duff for having called his book 'A History of the Mahrattas', since it included the activities of

9. The main source of information for this Society is the report of its proceedings between 1882 and 1886, published under the title A Mirror of the Uplift of the Ksatriyas, Bombay 1886, (Marathi), by its secretary, Banaji Bapujirao Angane. A copy of this report is in the Mumbai Marathi Granthasangrahalaya, Dadar, Bombay.

10. ibid., Chapter entitled 'The origin of the word Maratha and the subject of caste distinctions'.

many who were not Marathas at all, thereby creating great resentment amongst those who could lay claim to the status.[11]

The report described the Society's conviction that the term 'Ksatriya' derived from the word 'Ksatra', meaning authority or power, and drew its conclusions as to the proper role of Ksatriyas in society accordingly:

> 'The meaning of the word Ksatra is power or authority. Those who go forward to oppose a hostile army see their proper role as exercising authority in this land. It is we who have to protect it with our very lives. The strength of those who strive on the field of battle with their comrades is the strength of the country itself'.

All those who had striven in such a way should call themselves Ksatriya, and this included the humblest of soldiers.[12] However, the report argued, the fact that many Ksatriyas had now ceased from practising the professions of warriors did not mean that they were no longer Ksatriyas:

> 'Even though Ksatriyas have taken up trade, agriculture and animal husbandry, this does not pollute their Ksatriya lineage, or their Ksatriya dharma. Even though they have acquired the arts of learning, they should not forget the use of their weapons. But they should take to earning their living through education if they can'. [13]

11 . Banaji Bapujirao Angane. A Mirror of the Uplift of the Ksatriyas. Chapter entitled 'Learning'.

12 . ibid., Chapter entitled 'Ksatradharma'. This title has an obvious play on words: it could be taken to mean either 'The dharma of Ksatriyas', or 'The dharma of the powerful'.

13 . idem.

The issues raised by the Society were clearly linked with a broader consciousness within the non-Brahman movement of the political significance of the term 'Maratha'. A letter to the Din Bandhu newspaper of 15 April 1888 praised the report of the Society, and the efforts of the secretary, Banaji Bapujirao Angane, in publishing it:

> 'He has shown his caste brothers their proper Ksatriya descent, their duties and position.....because of this, the book has found acceptance amongst all the Marathas, from the most illiterate to the very learned, and everyone is able fully to recognise his Ksatriya lineage.'

The letter compared Angane's book with Rajaramasastri Bhagavat's work 'A few words about the Marathas'. Bhagavat's work had begun as a serial in the journal Vividhadnyan Vistar in 1885, and had been published as a book in 1887. One of the arguments of Bhagavat's book was that no Maratha could claim an untarnished Ksatriya lineage for himself, since there had been such a mixing of castes throughout India's history. The author of the letter argued that Bhagavat had written the book as a result of the agitations led by Bhau Kondaji Patil in Junnar, with a view to fomenting quarrels and divisions amongst the Ksatriya Marathas.[14]

The Society also had direct contacts with Patil's movement in Junnar. The Society and the Satyashodhak Samaj had organised a joint mass gathering in May 1884 in the town of Junnar, and had heard a famous singer of kirtans describe the dharma of Ksatriyas

14. This letter is in the Din Bandhu of 15 April 1888. For references to Rajaramasastri Bhagavat, see pp. 244-250.

and the support for their position in the Hindu sastras.[15] Patil himself took a position very close to that of the Society on the question of Ksatriya status. He finished a letter to the Din Bandhu of 3 October 1897, declaring that the Brahmans called the cultivators Sudras in order to preserve their power over them, 'but if we look in very truth, we see that those who till the soil are of the Ksatriya lineage'.

4. Conclusion

This focus on Maratha identity implied a substantial shift in the direction of non-Brahman polemic from Phule's position of the early 1880's. Yet the assertion that Maharashtra's peasant, landholding and cultivating castes were the carriers of its most fundamental traditions, and so represented the natural leaders of society, remained as the central thrust of non-Brahman ideology into the new century. In a longer term perspective, the idea of a distinctive Maratha identity, shared throughout this section of Maharashtrian society, and the actual replacement on a mass scale of the title 'kunbi' with that of 'Maratha' that is evident in the Census Reports of the Bombay presidency from the 1880's, were to be some of the most lasting contributions of the nineteenth century movement to the shaping of Maharashtrian society in the next century.[16]

15. Banaji Bapujirao Angane, A Mirror of the Uplift of the Ksatriyas, Chapter entitled 'The support given by the Society to the kirtan singers'. A kirtan is a story, usually with a religious content, that is narrated to music.

16. In the Census Report of 1901 for the Bombay presidency, for example, 332,786 returned themselves as Marathas - either as Marathas proper, Konkani Marathas or Maratha kunbis, whereas only 98,183 returned themselves as plain kunbis, for the Pune district. This creation of a Maratha status shared throughout the whole caste grouping, and the virtual disappearance of the term kunbi by the 1930's in Maharashtra, was a process to which the non-Brahman movement contributed, rather than one for which it was wholly responsible. As such, it forms an area for which much more research is needed. Census of India for 1901, Bombay Report, Vol. 9a, pp. 206-207.

Chapter Sixteen.

Epilogue: ideology and politics in mid-nineteenth century western India.

This study has delineated an area of ideological and political conflict of nineteenth century India that has been relatively neglected by political historians. It is worth asking how far the former can be accommodated within the theories of political development that were described in Chapter One.

The organised public and political activities of the early Congress movement, which were the institutional predecessors of the latter at the provincial level, and the factional conflicts which aimed to capture these new structures, formed the material from which these theories of political development were constructed. This kind of political organisation was, as the protagonists of such theories themselves argue, called into existence by the administrative structures of the British Raj. As a mode of political activity, therefore, it was new and highly specialised. It was concerned with election and representation; with the construction of the organisational infrastructure of a representative and 'public' political system; and with the establishment, around these, of informal networks of political connection and patronage designed to capture these new structures. It was thus as much the product of nineteenth century European liberal politics as it was a natural outgrowth of traditional Indian modes of political organisation and rule. Yet these new, and really very specialised modes are made to stand as the master key to an understanding of Indian political

development broadly conceived. It is here, as Dr. Baker puts it, that 'the aims of politics' are to be found, and 'the arenas within which they were contained'.[1] These forms of political organisation stand as the criterion of significance for all other forms of such activity: those rooted in traditional culture; the incoherent and the disorganised; and those that were without the skills of literacy and language that were important for success in these new political fields. This highly particular criterion of what constitutes real change, even the objective process of modernisation itself, is represented as a universal one, which might be applied to the study of political change anywhere. This constitutes 'proper' political activity; these are the modes of organisation with which the future lies. Other styles, from the non-Brahman movement to the movements of Hindu revivalism, which either could not or would not accommodate themselves to the new styles by which the institutions of the Raj were to be engaged, are set aside as outdated, or simply as failures, whose protagonists either failed to discern the real movement of India's political development, or were unsuccessful in adjusting themselves to it.

The decision to view the extension of British administration, and the emergence of an organised Indian response, as the process of political development par excellence in India, also tends to distort the picture of political activists in these areas during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their activity is made

1. C. Baker, review of Eugene Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929. Berkeley., University of California Press, 1969, in Modern Asian Studies, 5,3, July 1971, p. 277.

to appear as the informing principle of the process of modernisation itself that was in some way 'necessary' to engage the institutions of the Raj. In this way, the activities of these groups come to be given a spurious objectivity. Here, the study of a lower caste political ideology that violently opposed both the possible extension of representative institutions, and the early nationalist organisations themselves, serves to remind us that the latter were not in any logical sense necessary, a part of some objective process of political modernisation; nor can they be used as a kind of master key to the understanding of the political changes of the late nineteenth century. Rather than seeing the new kinds of political activity brought into being by the extensions of British administration, and the groups that engaged in these as the guardians of the future, it would be as well to remember that they and their own highly specialised modes represented only one vision of the Indian political future, and therefore only one version of the effects that were to be sought from British rule. Thus, the support of the moderate politicians for the adoption of certain modes of political activity, and a specific type of connection with British rule, in which they occupied the central position of mediators between the British government and the larger masses of Hindu society, can be seen as a piece of special pleading, or as the particular ideology of one group among many.

Besides these must be placed the groups that denied such proposals vigorously, such as non-Brahman leaders in western India. They fought against the idea that the effects of British rule should be to develop political institutions and modes of political activity

in which few had the resources or skills to engage, or that the whole process should rest in the hands of the relatively small groups who did possess such skills.

The political institutions called into existence by the Raj did not form the only focus for non-Brahman protest. The latter saw the distribution of real power in western Indian society equally affected in favour of Brahman castes as their skills gave them a numerical predominance, and a strategic mediatory position within the administrative institutions of British rule. The dimension of conflict to be found at the level at which such institutions impinged upon local society, from local educational establishments to the conduct of rent and remission assessments, or even the control of the simple administrative procedures in the local courts, is an area which political historians of the Raj have not taken seriously as impinging upon the power relations in local society. Yet for non-Brahman polemicists at least, it is clear that this formed a crucial aspect of real local political power, which was used to influence issues of much wider social and religious significance. Moreover, they saw a clear ideological connection between the establishment of political institutions in which Brahmans enjoyed a numerical predominance, such as the Sarvajanik Sabha, and the adoption by Brahmans of new administrative and professional roles. They argued that both kinds of activity produced a similar position of mediation, carrying a power denied to the broader masses of Indian society who did not adopt these administrative and political styles. Non-Brahman ideologues like Phule sought not so much the control of the same institutions but, rather, a fundamentally

different set of structures for the administration of British power, and a longer period of benevolent paternal rule by the British while the lower castes gained the skills and social resources that they had failed to develop in traditional society.

In this way, the study of lower caste ideologies helps to turn our attention to that much neglected area of Indian politics in the nineteenth century: the tensions and rivalries between social groups within Indian society. British rule, and its implications for the future of Indian political institutions, became a crucially important new factor, bearing upon the existing distribution of political power between different social groups in every province to which British rule and administration were extended. The new organisation of political activity around the institutions of British rule, and the increasing tendency for political power to be centralised there, had a profound effect upon this distribution of power and resources. It was natural, therefore, that the issues of the present local power bestowed by administrative institutions, and the future development of India's political institutions, should be a matter for dispute, both ideological and political. The fact of British rule did not in any sense lessen political conflict internally within Indian society, or mean that the political goals and advantages for which Indians fought, were now restricted to the spoils of office. Instead, the shape of the new political institutions build around the British administration were themselves the subject of intense contention. A great deal of real conflict in Indian society occurred at a point logically much prior to the struggle for control of political institutions themselves.

Having said all this, some of the conclusions to which this study points are very similar to those reached in the work described in Chapter One. In particular, they bear out the arguments of Gordon Johnson and Christopher Baker that non-Brahman ideologies of the late nineteenth century cannot be traced back to massive caste antagonisms in traditional society.[2] Rather, the tensions which provoked them, and the identities to which they gave rise, were of distinctly nineteenth century origin. First was the perception that the political institutions of Indian society were developing in a way that promised great power to a small social group already in possession of the religious authority bestowed by conventional Hinduism upon Brahmans. Second was the fact that this perception developed against the broader cultural background of a massive attack on the legitimacy of traditional religious values and social hierarchies. In the process of creating a new political and religious identity for the lower castes, polemicists like Phule certainly drew upon symbols, loyalties and conflicts within traditional culture. Yet the ideological constructs that resulted went far beyond any of these.

This brings us immediately to two related questions. The first is whether this means that the ideological activity of men like Phule were, as Gordon Johnson argues, 'an expression of factional fighting between elite groups; a few rounds of shadow

2. See Chapter One, pp. 12-13.

boxing between those who were, or sought to be, the spokesmen of Maharashtra'.[3] The second concerns the status of non-Brahman ideology itself, especially in relation to the institutions that developed within the non-Brahman movement from the 1880's, such as the Maratha and Ksatriya societies, and the more general problems of explaining the growth and purpose of apparently caste-based institutions at the end of the nineteenth century.

For the second question, I would like to refer to an essay by David Washbrook on the growth of caste associations in the Madras Presidency from the 1880's, in the book of essays on South India edited with Christopher Baker.[4] The parallels here are not exact, but there is enough common ground for the comparison to suggest new lines of enquiry for what is a very difficult area. Washbrook describes the various kinds of caste organisation that arose in the Presidency from the 1880's. In some cases, such as that of the Arya Vaishya Mahasabha, the politicisation of the horizontal ties of caste were the clear result of economic forces, and improved communications, that brought about the growth of real communal connections. The origins of other kinds of caste organisation, in particular the numerous and fragmented attempts at unity amongst the agricultural castes, were more difficult to decipher. Although caste remained important as a status concept, the formal institutions of

3. Gordon Johnson, Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1880-1915, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 107.

4. D. Washbrook, 'The Development of Caste Organisation in South India 1880-1925' in C. Baker and D. Washbrook (Eds.), South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940 Macmillan, Meerut, 1975, pp. 150-203.

ritual and communal life were unimportant or had ceased to exist. Therefore, the pressures to create caste confrontations, and the machinery to transport them on to the mega-category level, were just not present. The operational category of politics was the faction in which members drawn from different castes were held together by transactional ties to a leader. In this way, the growth of caste-based institutions could not be explained by reference to patterns of continuity in the traditional institutions, or by any social history of castes or mega-categories that possessed no objective social existence.

Central to his own explanation is Washbrook's idea of 'the publicist': a small new urban service class, supported by the wealthy magnates of different caste and communal groups. Theirs was the task of conjuring up identities for regional, religious and caste groupings, as the British government seemed likely to patronise each kind of community. This, he argues, helps explain the plasticity of India's political organisations at the end of the nineteenth century, and the startling phantoms which could be produced at the level of provincial politics. However, these phantoms were eventually to fill out and to acquire a real social existence as the British government tailored its policies around them.[5]

This explanation has some applicability to caste ideologies in western India, and to the example of ideologues such as Phule. Yet I would like to take issue with it on some points, and to focus initially on one reason for the drawbacks of this and similar treat-

5. David Washbrook, op. cit., pp. 150-203.

ments of caste-based movements in this period. Despite his declared intention of trying to explain caste-based movements, Washbrook does not address himself to the actual ideas and rhetoric of caste associations, or to their own statements of their political purposes, and is therefore at something of a disadvantage in examining their relationship with contemporary political conflicts. In his account, the ideologies of caste unity appear either as an ad hoc vote-catching expedient made to the specification of rich patrons, or as one of many administrative fictions evoked by the policies of the British government. Neither of these apply to the ideologies described here, or to the caste-based institutions associated with them from the early 1880's. What is most striking about them is their strong root, not in traditional caste antagonisms, but in the loyalties, symbols and identities that were central to traditional popular culture, and their use of these traditional elements, given a strong new political twist, to forge a new common identity for the lower castes. Also very noticeable are the immense pains taken by different non-Brahman polemicists to give their work consistency, both internally, and in terms of the real social phenomena that they sought to reinterpret in their writing. Moreover, the evidence examined here suggests, for western India, quite a different time-table and set of influences behind the transformation of these new ideological constructs into actual popular identities. Far from being a phenomenon that only occurred some time after the initial projection of these new identities, and in response to shifts in British perceptions of Indian society, this transformation went on almost in step with the ideological formulation itself, and occurred

in reply not to British expectations, but to the potent combination of traditional social symbols and new political perceptions that these ideological formulations contained.

A point worth adding here concerns the more general relationship between ideologies, the political leaders who seek to realise them, and the process of political conflict that such a realisation usually involves. The possible roles that Washbrook envisages for ideologies of caste unity seem to reflect the notion that wherever it is possible to find an instrumental function for a belief, this means that it has been adopted for the advantages that it brings, in contrast to beliefs that carry no benefits and are held for their own sake. This represents a two-dimensional view of human activities and beliefs, and is particularly inappropriate for the study of the relationship between leaders and the political movements that they organise. Some kind of instrumentality, whether emotional, social, material or spiritual, appears in every human relationship and belief, but this does not mean that such beliefs are held without emotion and commitment. It is precisely the task of the historian to describe how these may represent a particular worldview which was at once firmly believed, but which had embodied in its perceptions of social and political life, the hopes and fears of particular social groups. It is clearly difficult to convey the delicate tension between the drive to belief and the objective convincingness, in its own historical context, of the larger view of society and history which such beliefs propose. Yet these elements are surely the very features of political and religious ideology as

a rival world-building activity which give it its great power to move men and women at all levels of society. A second point may be made about the way in which beliefs are held. Even if an individual leader embarked on some political activity purely for his own gain, the very ideologies and political structures within which he would have to work would impose at least some degree of consistency upon his behaviour. This kind of consistency is certainly present amongst non-Brahman polemicists.[6]

This returns us to the first question that we asked, that of whether non-Brahman polemicists can be seen as an elite seeking, like any other, to stand as the spokesmen of Maharashtrian society. Men like Phule certainly did represent an elite, taking the lead in fashioning from traditional cultural materials a new identity for a very broad section of Maharashtrian society, and seeking to give this identity a real social and political existence. Yet the fact that non-Brahman leaders were an identifiable elite does not mean that their political and ideological activity can be seen as a factional dispute with the Brahmans whom they regarded as their adversaries. The assertion that if the leaders of a political movement can be shown to be a distinguishable elite, then their activities can be assimilated to a larger model of elite competition as a contentless factional rivalry, is based on a misconception about the nature of caste identities and movements themselves. This

6. I am most grateful to Professor Richard Fox for a very illuminating discussion of these issues, and for letting me see his unpublished paper, 'Ethnicity as a consequence', written with V. Dominguez.

is the old notion that caste identities are social givens, so that movements based upon caste should have a natural or spontaneous origin, and should not need elites to lead them and define their identities. However, Richard Fox has argued, and this study has tried to show, that caste, ethnic, and other group identities are not something static and primordial, but are the constructions of human action, and are subject to change as their broader social environment changes.[7] It is here, in the constitution of new identities in response to such changes, that elites - the political leaders and ideologues that have the access to ideas and education, and the relative leisure and affluence to pursue them - perform their crucial task. Here, David Washbrook's notion of 'the publicist', acting as an interpreter and a catalyst for new identities, forms a very useful concept.

I hope that this will make clear the points at which I would agree and disagree with the assimilation of non-Brahman ideological activity to a larger model of essentially homogenous elite rivalry. There was certainly a level at which non-Brahman ideologues competed with those from other points of the political spectrum; to project their own interpretations upon Maharashtra's traditions; to rally broad popular support for these interpretations; and to project themselves as the true representatives of Maharashtrian society before the British government. Yet this would be only a part of the picture. If what has been argued here about the role of elites is true, then matters could hardly have been otherwise. On the other hand, very substantial differences between non-Brahman leaders and their adversaries lay elsewhere. There was the

7. Richard Fox and V. Dominguez, 'Ethnicity as a Consequence', (unpublished paper), pp. 9-29.

fundamental ideological difference over the nature of political and administrative institutions. If these elites competed with each other, it was with the aim of influencing the British government in radically different directions. Moreover, the whole ideology of Ksatriya status that non-Brahmans employed, both to support their contention that the main sources of power that lay within society had been taken out of the hands of its natural leaders, and to create a broad popular identification with this proposal, differed of necessity from the means used by other political leaders. This reinforces the argument that while the 'elite rivalry' explanation for non-Brahman activity is a true one, it is by no means complete, and is certainly misleading if it is understood to be complete. The description of 'elite rivalry' as undifferentiated carries the assumption that elites are more or less interchangeable. The process by which they choose between the particular interest groups that they are to organise is influenced only by their perception of the relative advantages that each would bring. It does not depend on any social or cultural connection between that which might be of use in the construction of institutions and ideologies, since this would suggest that in some cases there were differences in the ways that elites set about the task of ideological reconstruction, and even that the existence of such a linkage might be a factor in deciding the outcome of such efforts. The example of Phule and other non-Brahman polemicists suggests that there was a very strong connection between their own social experience, the constituencies that they adopted as their own and the political and ideological strategies that they pursued. Indeed, this very linkage was one of their most important assets.

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Introduction.

The sources and material used in this study that relate directly to Mahatma Jotirao Phule's career and ideas may be divided into three categories. The first of these is formed by the material that Phule himself wrote. A list of his published works may be found at the end of this Bibliography. These have formed the single most important source for this thesis. With a very few exceptions, however, there is no other substantial surviving corpus of material written by Phule himself. His letters and papers have been lost, leaving a gap in our direct knowledge of his life and ideas that it is very difficult to fill from other sources.[1] Some of his letters are published in contemporary newspapers, such as the Dnyanodaya and the Din Bandhu.

The second category is of direct references to Phule by his colleagues and contemporaries, both European and Indian. These are plentiful, if somewhat scattered, and are of great use in building up a picture of Phule as an individual.

The third category is of biographical and secondary works concerning Phule. The material here is extremely difficult to use. Phule's central importance as a symbol in the twentieth-century non-Brahman movement, and the great interest in him as the hero of the lower castes that exists in Maharashtra today, means that it has

1. We are told by his friend, Gyanoba Sasane, that Phule's son sold his books, letters and papers to a merchant, who swindled the family: Gyanoba Sasane to P.S. Patil, Hadapasar, 14 March, 1927. P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur. Certainly, no corpus of letters and papers was available to Phule's first biographer, P.S. Patil.

become very difficult to tell fact from fiction in the accounts of Phule written in this century. Phule's earliest biographer was P.S. Patil, whose The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule was published in 1927.[2] Patil was himself a non-Brahman activist, who collected much of his material by writing in the early 1920's - some thirty years after Phule's death - to all those who had known him, and asking them to send in their memories of Phule, and any other information that they might have. The considerable body of letters that resulted are now collected in the P.S. Patil MSS in Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur. These letters have two drawbacks. First, they are impossible to document. Second, they often tell us as much about the formation of twentieth-century non-Brahman opinion, and of the formation of an agreed corpus of opinion about Phule, rather than providing direct or independent information about him. This makes them, and P.S. Patil's biography, of fairly limited use for the researcher, and I have tried always to use them in conjunction with other sources. There is a further difficulty, which is that almost all of Phule's subsequent biographers have relied on the information given in Patil, thereby adding another layer of interpretation and unsupported assertion to what is already a very tangled body of information. The exception here is Dhananjay Keer's work, which makes use of some independent contemporary sources.[3] More modern

2. P.S. Patil, The Life of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Cikhali, 1927. (Marathi)

3. Dhananjay Keer, Mahatma Jotirao Phooley, Father of Indian Social Revolution, Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974.

accounts are those by Y.D. Phadke, an excellent and very scholarly analysis of the activities of Phule's most important colleagues in the Satyashodhak Samaj,[4] and Gail Omvedt's pioneering survey of the non-Brahman movement in western India, from 1873 to 1930, which contains a very useful chapter on Phule.[5]

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1. Tratiya Ratna: 'The Third Eye'. Phule completed the Manuscript for this play in 1855, but it was not published in his lifetime. The first published edition is in the journal Purogami Satyashodhak (Marathi) 5,2, April-June 1979.

2. Chatrapati Sivaji Raje Bhosale yaca Pavada: 'A Ballad of the Chatrapati Raja Sivaji Bhosale'. This work was published in Bombay in June 1869, and has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

3. Brahmanace Kasaba: 'Priestcraft Exposed'. This work was published in Bombay in 1869, and has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

4. Vidyakhatyatila Brahmana Pantoji: 'Brahman Teachers in the Education Department'. This ballad was published in the journals Vividhadnyan Vistar and Satyadipika (both Marathi) in July and September 1869 respectively. The comments that accompany the ballad in the Vividhadnyan Vistar suggest that the ballad was only one of a larger collection written at the same time. No copy of these have so far been recovered.

5. Gulamagiri: 'Slavery'. This work was published in Pune in 1873. It has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

6. Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission. Phule made a long statement to the Hunter Commission on Education in India, in 1882. This was not published independently during his lifetime, but has been reprinted in the collection of his works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

7. Setakaryaca Asud: 'The Cultivator's Whip-Cord'. This work was made up of a collection of Phule's speeches delivered to Satyashodhak audiences in 1882-1883. He put these together and made a manuscript copy to send to the Earl of Dufferin. This manuscript is in the National Library of Calcutta. The work was not published during Phule's lifetime, but has been published in the collection of his works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

8. Satsar: 'The Essence of Truth'. Issues one and two, published in Pune in 1885. Phule hoped to make this into a regular series, but publication was discontinued after the second issue. Both of these have been reprinted in the collection of Phule's works edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

9. Asprasyace Kaifiyat: 'The Tale of the Untouchables'. This work was completed in 1885, but was not published during Phule's lifetime. The manuscript is in the P.S. Patil MSS, Sivaji University Library, Kolhapur.

10. Satyashodhak Samajokta Mangalastakasaha Sarva Pujavidhi: 'All the Rites, Ceremonies and Verses used by the Satyashodhak Samaj'. This small book was published in Bombay in 1887, and has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's work edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

11. Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak: 'A Book of True Religion for All'. Phule completed this work in 1889. It was published in 1891, a year after his death, in Bombay. It has been reprinted in the collection of Phule's work edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe.

Note: This list excludes letters and other small pieces published only in contemporary newspapers. A collection has been made of some of these in the collection of Phule's work edited by D. Keer and S.G. Malshe. This list includes items that were written as independent works, although some of them were not published during Phule's lifetime. The original Marathi titles are followed by the English translations that have been used throughout this study.